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# GERMANY IN PERIL

For death is come up into our windows, and is entered into our palaces, to cut off the children from without, and the young men from the streets.  
(Jeremiah ix. 21.)

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# GERMANY IN PERIL

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*A Study by*  
ERICH MEISSNER

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To  
DR. J. H. OLDHAM

# I

## THE THESIS OF THIS BOOK

THE exaggerations and misstatements of war propaganda have one very serious effect. Peace comes one day; the guns cease to fire and the busy mills of propaganda cease to grind. The abusive political pamphlets are laid aside and forgotten but the element of truth which they often contain is also forgotten and discarded. This I consider dangerous. No book should be published in wartime about an acute political problem unless the author would like to see it reprinted after the conflict has come to an end. This general consideration has been the principle that I have tried to follow.

The problem of Germany that has puzzled so many minds is the subject of this book. This problem is not an abyss of psychological intricacies; we are not called upon to probe the depths of an entirely alien mind that worships Gods as strange as Mexican idols. We must of course admit that strange Gods are worshipped in Germany to-day. But the men and women who are kneeling in front of new altars are very much like the people whom you meet anywhere else and the question arises: How was this possible? Why did these people yield to strange new standards? The lazy-minded answer: 'All this is perfectly simple, the Germans are like that' is, I consider, no answer at all, for it makes real understanding impossible. It tries to shift the whole problem on to psychological ground, for once this trick has been performed and the problem is stated and accepted as an entirely psychological one, only small efforts are needed to finish it off, like the bad hunter who clubs a sitting bird.

All attempts to explain the German problem psychologically can be safely disregarded. It matters little whether they are journalistic or scholarly; the starting-point is wrong. They fail to realize the fellowship of European nations which is more than an ideal—it is a fact and remains a fact whether recognized or not. For the nations of Europe are not only the makers of our common civilization, they are its creatures as well—hence their fellowship. The thesis that the Germans do not really belong to this civilization, that it is all veneer with them, deserves no serious answer; ignorance alone can excuse such statements. Our suspicions and misgivings should be extended to another category of books—the collections of German self-criticisms and self-



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condemnations. These anthologies always contain the same gems, differently arranged. But none of the great Germans whose occasional bitter remarks about his own nation have thus been laboriously collected would ever have presented such criticisms as his well-considered verdict. Schopenhauer's wounded vanity, Nietzsche's solitary despair, Hölderlin's juvenile melancholy—these are all passing moods leading to no more than angry remarks expressing the irritation of the moment. No great German has ever denounced his own parentage. Great men obey the fifth commandment, if not from conviction, then by instinct.

The German problem is an *historical* problem. It is a *story* that has to be told. The story is by no means simple, for a subtle, slow-working process of disintegration has to be revealed, covering, roughly speaking, two hundred years and passing through many different stages. The thesis of this book will meet with contradiction and criticisms from many quarters. That a period of political expansion and conspicuous prosperity (notably a prosperity of the prosperous) should be labelled as a period of decline, that such dynamic forces as Capitalism and Prussianism or the Totalitarian State are not a sign of health but indicate a disturbed equilibrium of state and society—all these statements will presumably be received with much disapproval. Nor can I hope to 'prove' my case. The nature of the problem allows no scientific 'proof'. This book is therefore highly controversial. My subject is—Germany in peril. But I consider it a futile enterprise to treat this story of German decline as an isolated event. Its significance cannot be grasped unless we realize that it is only one aspect of a much vaster affair. The whole European civilization is imperilled. All countries are affected. Behind the façade of traditional institutions and conventions great changes have taken place everywhere, the gravity of which is not always fully realized. It needs some sudden shock, a great calamity, a severe test, in order to bring to light the real state of affairs. The wider aspect of the problem, however, is not within the scope of the present publication. But it is in the light of the general European situation that the special German problem has to be examined. Otherwise everything falls out of proportion. I shall now set forth the thesis of this book in form of a short summary. But the reader is asked to bear in mind that the inevitable simplification of a thesis cannot do full justice to a problem of great complexity.

## THE THESIS OF THIS BOOK

I. The most important event in the history of Germany and of Europe as well is the Reformation. The religious dissensions paved the way for all evils to come, for the unity of Christendom which is the basis of our civilization became precarious, and disruptive forces found less resistance. The implications of this mighty change have been fully and competently analysed and though the debate among scholars has not quite come to an end, the main point of the analysis has been accepted as true. The peril of Europe begins with the Reformation. The analysis referred to is the work of historians, it does not necessarily affect religious convictions. As Luther said in his controversy with Erasmus: 'Stop lamenting! God is the instigator of this turmoil. He is still at work. Rebellion, confusion, discord and war, all this we must bear. These evils rise and shake the world because the Word of God is on its way.' That is the attitude which Protestantism again and again adopted. The Reformation, however, can be safely left aside in the present investigations though it was the source of all that was to follow. I shall concentrate on forces of disintegration which are peculiar to Germany.

II. German disintegration began with the rise of Prussia in the middle of the eighteenth century. The unique system and mentality of Prussia made her a potent dissolvent of German tradition once she got the chance of extending her rule. The richer elements of national life tend to wither away under Prussian influence. There are special reasons for that. But the actual development which took place was by no means inevitable. There was a stage during Napoleonic times when it looked as if the destructive influence might be checked and transformed, by Prussia being truly incorporated into the superior German tradition. It was, however, a passing stage. What followed was the Prussian conquest of Germany culminating in Bismarck's Reich. It was Prussia's triumph.

III. The triumph of Prussia coincided with the industrial revolution; thus two victorious forces pooled their strength. This alliance or co-operation is the essence of Bismarck's Reich and marks the character of the whole period between 1870 and the Great War. The capitalist system threw Germany and other countries as well into a grave state of instability; deterioration proceeded on a vast scale hidden behind the façade of a so-called prospering society. Tradition was exposed to what scientists call 'erosion'; the soil went.

IV. The Great War ended with Prussia's defeat in the field

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and consequently with Prussia's defeat inside Germany. But the German nation was then incapable of the creative effort which the situation demanded. Prussia was not supplanted. A feeble and unattractive democracy and the capitalist system, equally unattractive and very much out of gear, filled the vacant place. The instability of state and society, the general deterioration became patent. The policy of the Allies unintentionally supported and strengthened the rising opposition. The defeat of Prussia inside Germany bore no fruit.

V. Hitlerism, in itself a suburban mass movement emerging from general weariness and despair, has succeeded in joining forces with reawakened Prussia. The Nazi régime, though powerful and efficient in many ways, actually intensifies the deterioration of the national life. The German rearmament signifies a resurrection of Prussia on a large scale; Prussia is serving a new master now, a master of marked moral and intellectual inferiority.

VI. The philosophy of Nihilism accepts disintegration as such and welcomes it. This philosophy, highly civilized though perverted, is undoubtedly the most advanced and forcible expression of European decline which has so far appeared. It is demoniac. Nowhere else has negation gone so far, nowhere else has tradition been defied with such vigour. According to this philosophy it is Prussia's mission to destroy Europe and to supplant it by her new order.

The moment to attempt this has come.

If we say that European civilization, the ancient traditions of Christendom, are imperilled, we must bring this problem down to bedrock. The shortest way of stating the case is this: during the last few centuries a vast majority of Christian men have lost their homes in every sense of the word. The number of those cast out into the wilderness of a dehumanized society is steadily increasing. In spite of growing towns, growing populations, expanding industries, social services, effective planning, the ancient realms of Europe are becoming more and more uninhabitable for human beings. There is misery, even if there is bread, which is often lacking. Christian doctrine holds that Man is *in statu viatoris*—on his way. This philosophy of life, however, often attacked for its 'other-worldliness', has moulded a civilization which gave men a home and the daily bread as well. It has secured in the past the limited happiness which mortals can hope for. To-day, the sources of human happiness are drying up rapidly. Substitutes are needed

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and provided, amongst others the thrill of dynamic energy. Our ancient civilization, however, is not doomed. Nor is its future course settled by fate, one way or the other. We must reject the philosophy of fatalism which during the nineteenth century had become so powerful an element in European affairs, moulding socialism but directing capitalists as well. The fatalist outlook is a very typical modern attitude, so much so that the profound spiritual change in the general atmosphere is often insufficiently noticed. The philosophy of fatalism is in itself a sign of spiritual decline, in spite of its many impressive manifestations, its quality and force. In this book I have set myself the task of showing how far disintegration has gone in the case of Germany, but I hope to show also that traditions in Germany, older and richer than anything Prussia can supply, not to mention the Nazis, are still alive and might assert themselves in a very unexpected way. The same applies to Europe.

Tradition is by no means dead, but real danger is imminent. Let there be no illusion about this. The time might come and be nearer than we think, when the ant-heap of society, worked out to full perfection, deserves only one verdict: unfit for men. The nations of Europe have risen together in the glorious period wrongly called the dark ages; a common danger confronts them now. Together they will have to find their way out of this deadly peril and recover the health of their past. The alternative is to accept—as the Nihilists do—deterioration as a welcome event and to settle down in a world repugnant to the deepest instincts of our race. A third solution does not exist.

## II

### THE ORIGINS OF PRUSSIA AND THE PRUSSIAN SYSTEM

**F**REDERICK WILLIAM I (1713–1740) was the founder of Prussia. He did not create it out of nothing; his predecessors, –particularly his grandfather, the great Elector, left him a state which had already acquired a remarkable administrative and military efficiency. Nor was Frederick William, I think, conscious of the fact that he was transforming the electorate of Brandenburg into the Kingdom of Prussia. It needs distance to appreciate such changes. He certainly knew what he wanted and carried out his ideas with tenacity, but the full implications of his work were not grasped by himself. Nor did his contemporaries realize what was actually going on. Frederick William caught people's imagination; they found him queer. The miser king who banned all luxury from his Court and made his own family eat unwholesome cabbages (if we can trust the account of his daughter), the soldier king who always wore uniform but was really not a great soldier, rather a royal drill-sergeant, these were vivid impressions well remembered because they stood in marked contrast to the pattern of monarchy worked out in France by Louis XIV and generally accepted and imitated by nearly all European rulers.

Prussia, it must be understood, is a mentality and not a nation. It is a frame of mind, an attitude of service, which was originally imposed upon soldiers and civil servants of a minor state and gradually grew up into a formidable system. There was no tricky scheme behind it, no philosophy of government, nothing of the kind—Frederick William I considered the Prussian mentality the most natural thing in the world, the only proper way of serving him. What did he demand? First of all, obedience. The King gives the orders and his servants obey. Opposition made him furious. In one of his dominions, Cleve, he once encountered resistance, perfectly within legal limits, but the King was enraged. 'I declare herewith', he wrote, 'that I consider all those who have opposed the tax to be nothing but rascals, dirty dogs, fools, useless people who do not deserve their bread.' Secondly, he demanded that everything should be done in the most punctilious way; he insisted upon details being properly attended to. This might be called pedantry, but it brought about Prussian efficiency. Prussia's administration and her army were run on these lines. Corruption

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of any sort was punished ruthlessly. Offenders were hanged. The King's ideas about government, though vigorously pursued, were simple enough. Administration had to provide the money necessary to build up a large army, which was the real object of all his cares. He did not spare himself nor did he spare others in order to reach his goal. It was a hard task to serve the King of Prussia; utmost efforts were taken for granted. Lack of praise is Prussian. We may add, words as such are not a Prussian instrument. This might be traced back to boorish incapacity, for it needs intellectual gifts, even some refinement, to choose words well and to express thoughts. Frederick William was certainly a boor, but he was not inarticulate. His letters and other documents prove that he was perfectly capable of bringing his point home, but he did it in a crude and erratic way, like throwing stones. There are communities and societies where a thousand words are used when fifty are needed. Prussian tradition tends to use five. But there is more behind this attitude than sheer incapacity and lack of refinement, it is the contempt of verbosity.

All this is incidental; we have not yet reached the centre, the idea or the instinct which bound everything together and gave the Prussian system its force and coherence. A popular legend tells that Hannibal's troops lost their strength and vigour when they took quarters in Capua and were exposed to all the softening influences of an easy life. Florus writes: 'When Hannibal could make use of his victory, he preferred enjoyment and chose to leave Rome alone and enter Campania and Tarentum. While they were in these parts Hannibal himself grew slack and the keen morale of his troops deteriorated; so much so that it was said that Capua was Hannibal's Cannae. Though the Alps did not even beat him, nor our arms break him, the sunshine of Campania and Baiae, with its warm springs, were (incredible though it may seem) his undoing.'

It matters little whether Capua really had this bad effect on Hannibal's army or not; the story seems to be unfounded. But there can be no doubt that 'Capua' taken as a symbol, represents a grim, undeniable reality; self-indulgence, pleasure and refinement affect man's strength, softness lowers vitality—this surely is not a legend but a fact which can be observed again and again in the lives of individuals and nations as well. Frederick William's studies of Roman history must have been very limited, presumably he had never come across Florus's story, but he nevertheless knew perfectly well what 'Capua' was, and he feared and hated it.

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This fear amounted to obsession with him and displayed itself in many rather foolish and capricious ideas—these whims have passed away with Frederick William and are by now forgotten, we must read them up in books—but the fear and hate of ‘Capua’ found also a more permanent expression and embodiment: the Prussian State. For this is the source of inspiration which has since then sustained and invigorated the institutions of Prussia; the determination to be an effective bulwark against the tide of any European ‘Capua’. We do well to realize fully the significance of this act of will. Born in the mind of an eccentric King, it has been incorporated into a State, it has become a firmly established attitude, a tradition linked up with memorable events. Prussia stands for many other things as well, most of them less respectable than the defiance of ‘Capua’, but it would be foolish if Prussia’s critics should not endeavour to grasp the positive forces which are at work on the side of their opponent. The uncompromising rejection of softness and self-indulgence always attracts the younger generation (or certainly some of them, and not the worst); it is like a clarion call and they do not fail to rally. The feminism of modern society intensifies such readiness.

There is one episode which clearly reveals Frederick William’s main idea, or better, the instinct which guided this strange and unattractive ruler. It is the struggle between the King and his son, a struggle of great historical consequence; for Frederick the Great emerged out of the bitter conflict, his great capacities unimpaired, perhaps even enhanced, but as a man and personality irreparably wounded, one might say corrupted. Such was the effect of the King’s educational methods, such was the outcome of his attempts to turn his son into an efficient champion of the new cause which he had set up and which he feared might perish. Let us examine the details of that story. Frederick was born in 1712. As a child he seemed to adapt himself well to his surroundings, he played soldiers, took interest in hunting and wrote little essays on subjects of divinity. The King had worked out detailed instructions for the tutors of his son. He stressed three points. First, the Prince must become a good soldier, otherwise—so he was to be told—he would be a despicable human being. Secondly, he must become a good administrator, and thirdly, a good Protestant Christian. There were, however, influences which worked in a different direction. Frederick’s mother, the daughter of George I, never felt at home in Prussia; she encouraged passive resistance of her children against their father. More important was the

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influence of French literature and art. Frederick took to books, he played a flute, he began to like comfort and an easy life. He preferred a dressing-gown to a uniform. He soon regarded the Court of his father as a prison where no pleasure was admitted. This feeling grew after he had visited Dresden, the luxurious residence of August II. This visit, which took place in February 1728, seems to have been the turning-point. From then onwards the conflict between father and son developed rapidly. First the King reprimanded his son; he called him effeminate and grubby, haughty and conceited. The French literature he considered piffle and poison as well. Dance masters, scribblers and whores—he put them all in the same category. His uncivilized contempt of music and literature might surprise, for Frederick William himself was an amateur painter. I think his paintings are more interesting than the poems of his son. Some were copies from Rembrandt and Titian; these were awful. But his imaginative work is quite fascinating. He chose strange symbolical subjects and the paintings reveal a slightly morbid and abnormal mind. No wonder. Frederick William signed his weird panels: '*In tormentis pinxit*', referring to his gout which forced him to stay at home and paint, not—as one might think—to mental agony. The King began to maltreat the Prince, he beat him in the presence of others, slapped his face and tore his hair. Many incidents of that kind are recorded in the memoirs of Frederick's sister. This source is not very reliable but there is other evidence as well. The Prince was stubborn; the father seemed to fail completely. In 1730 Frederick tried to escape. He accompanied the King on a tour of inspection, everything had been arranged for his flight, but in a rather slapdash manner. The plan failed. The fury of the despot knew no bounds. He called Frederick's offence 'desertion' and wanted it to be punished as such. He gave the impression that he was planning the execution of his son; many courts of Europe, including Vienna, intervened and asked the King to be lenient and merciful. Ranke maintains that there is no evidence that Frederick William was seriously contemplating a death sentence. I think he is right; it is more in keeping with the King's character that he should have used the threat to break his son's resistance. He went further; Lieutenant von Katte, who had been Frederick's accomplice, was sentenced to death (the court martial had sentenced him to imprisonment for life, the King revised the verdict). The execution took place outside Frederick's prison; he was ordered to watch the procedure. He fainted. The body of his



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friend was left lying outside nearly the whole day; the Prince did not leave the window, not even after the corpse had been removed. He went on staring at the place where the execution had taken place. This happened on the 6th of November. After that day and the night which followed—the guards heard him speak to himself—Frederick changed his attitude. He submitted to his father's will. He was prepared to behave exactly as the King wished. After some months there was a solemn scene of reconciliation. No further friction occurred. In his administrative work and in the discharge of his military duties the Crown Prince earned his father's full satisfaction. He married the wife Frederick William chose for him, though he loathed her. The King, after all, seemed to have won the battle. His anxieties vanished, he felt sure Frederick would be his true successor and preserve the newly established traditions of Prussia. These expectations, as we know, were fulfilled. But the repugnant side of Frederick's character, his profound deceitfulness, his cynicism, his lack of sympathy, were the result of the education which he received.

Many young Prussians brought up since on Neo-Spartan lines have devastated the countries and the happiness of other people, obeying orders, unflinchingly, stubbornly, perhaps often with glee. But what had to be devastated first and laid waste without mercy was their own hearts. They wanted strength but they were deceived. What they got was something quite different: callousness. The Prussian method of education (this term taken in its wider sense: the moulding of men's character) lacks care and vision. Human nature is not adequately understood. It is like a quack's cure: a very deliberate and drastic attempt, nothing could be more clumsy. But it would be futile to deny that there are results. The method is in many ways rather effective. Yet the results are bought at a high cost and those who administer this drastic cure are nearly always completely oblivious of its implications—just like Frederick William I—they really know not what they do. It is not a bad thing in itself to combat softness. Certainly the Prussians were not the first who set themselves this task. Sparta tried the same. Sturdy and convinced adherents of Spartan methods can be found amongst all nations and in all ages, only their efforts are usually on a smaller scale and less consistent. Therefore, Prussia and Sparta stand out in history, and Frederick II was right when he called his State 'The Sparta of the North'. But what strikes the careful observer of these systems of toughness going in for efficiency is this: there seems to be no

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permanence; therefore, we must conclude, there can be no real strength. For endurance, indestructibility (within the natural limits of mortal things), is always the token of real strength. Chinese tenacity might serve as an example of what I mean. There is wisdom behind that attitude, there is indomitable force. It is force well sustained. Sparta and Prussia are brittle. They cannot stand severe tests, they break down; but there may be innumerable revivals. What is the reason for this strange, hidden weakness? These systems overstrain and misjudge human nature; they blunder. They set out to transform Man into a highly active being, full of energy, driven on by his will-power, but they neglect, they disregard and they often openly despise the receptive faculties of our nature. These faculties are gentle; they are the soil and source of everything. True strength goes together with gentleness, this combination makes Man indomitable. Nothing else does. It was no longer necessary in the eighteenth century, nor is it to-day, to discover this truth, for it was embodied in the highest traditions of Europe. Does not almost every child in Christendom know the words: 'Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.' The profound wisdom of these words have permeated the atmosphere of our civilization. Little does he know of the actual life of European men throughout the centuries of our history who believes that the spirit of humility has been merely floating like a bodiless ghost or a beautiful sound through the aisles of our cathedrals. But Prussia, it is true, was never in full possession of our common inheritance, she was rather an outpost of Christendom, not only in the geographical sense. King Frederick William, a man of greater persistence than insight, was able to transform his remote realm into something new and unique, the implications of which he could hardly have foreseen. But the world of to-day is still labouring under the shadow of the clouds which this eccentric has gathered.

We have discussed so far two main aspects of the Prussian system, both of which are apparent already at the early stages of Prussia's history: first, its source of strength—the defiance of 'Capua'; secondly, the incompetence of its educational methods. We shall now examine the peculiar menace of the Prussian system. It has often been said that Prussia's militarism is the real curse that she inflicts upon the world. Propaganda has got hold of the term and used it indiscriminately. I think the statement is true, but it is necessary to say clearly what militarism means. There is a good deal of confusion about it, producing very harmful effects.

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It is not militarism to fight for one's country, nor is it militarism to organize an army or to praise and encourage the soldierly virtues. The ghastly horrors of war often throw confusion into afflicted minds. Then people consider it a moral progress if they are no longer capable of discriminating between murder and death in battle. They think it a crime to present a little boy with a box of tin soldiers and they honestly believe that by being firm on such points they are paving the way for peace. Prussia has not infrequently caused such reactions. Whilst she was forging her weapons, others, like ostriches, were putting their heads in the sand. Militarism is not what many honest but confused lovers of peace believe it to be—anything to do with arms. What is it, then? It is a military system under whose influence and overpowering weight the other elements of national life grow weak and wither away. Prussia is militaristic; Rome was not. If we compare these two states, both famous for their merits in war, the issue becomes clear. Prussia has a deadening influence; she turns fertile lands into deserts. The process is slow and gradual but it cannot be denied. What is the reason for this strange effect? It has been said that the whole problem boils down to a matter of budget. If a state spends too much of its revenue on its army, then the army as such and everything connected with it receive an undue importance. This is perfectly true. The standing army of Frederick William I (85,000 men) was out of proportion with Prussia's natural resources, her population of two millions and her needs. It was an eccentric idea to build up so strong an army. The army was the King's toy; it soon became his son's weapon. There was no political ambition behind Frederick William's armament programme. His foreign policy was timid, he was easily duped by foreign diplomats, felt it vaguely, reacted angrily, but could not do anything about it, the political game of chess was just too much for him. But the budget alone does not explain Prussia's militarism.

In 1933 I attended a lecture in Germany about air-raid precautions. The speaker elaborated the theory of total war. The frightful menace of modern warfare—so he said—could only be met and faced by a nation that was prepared to mould its peacetime conditions according to the necessities of war. He explained to his audience that all activities, whatever their nature may be, should be regarded as potential war weapons; that their actual value depends on their military usefulness. He gave examples; one I remember. The function of the Church, he said, was to

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give succour and consolation to the victims of air bombardment. This odd remark reveals like a flashlight the perversity and menace of militarism. The case can be stated thus: militarism disregards the true nature and proper function of everything outside the purely military sphere, not by neglecting or despising it—that is comparatively harmless—but by trying to rope it in. Militarism adulterates the substance of things. By doing so it gradually kills them, hence its deadening effect. A Church that was prepared to accept the position granted to her by the advocate of total war would have given up her inner life. Poor, indeed, must be the consolation that can be expected from such a spiritual A.R.P. department. But the same applies to any other side of human life. Militarism dries up its sap. We must pursue the problem one step further.

What is the cause of militarism? Why should there be this urge to transform everything into a potential weapon of war and to extend in so perverse a way the sphere of military control? The motive is, I think, fear. The theory of total war is obviously based on deep anxieties which, trying to avert dangers vividly perceived, actually precipitate their coming.

Total war, of course, is a very recent idea. This theory, however, is only the modern expression of militarism, adapted to present-day circumstances. The spirit of militarism, its tendency, its hidden fear, are the same even when the actual accomplishments be very limited. Prussia was not a Totalitarian State in the eighteenth century; far from it. Such an idea was quite inconceivable then. But the Prussia of Frederick William I was, nevertheless, just as militaristic as the grim modern reality of the Totalitarian State. The conditions of to-day give Prussia a special chance. Our lack of sympathy must not make us overlook the fact that Prussia is very modern. Her mentality lends itself to the competent pursuit of Totalitarian ideas which have become so strong a tendency in modern society, even in countries where the popular instinct still dislikes this new thing and where the term as such is rejected. Accurate planning is Prussia's strength, no details are forgotten, however small they may be, and the whole task is tackled with glee and satisfaction. To get everything under control is considered a joyful enterprise. This spirit, however, was already alive in the days of Frederick William, for Prussian militarism had been fully developed. The royal drill-sergeant always looked at the world from the doorstep of his barracks and he said, like the cobbler: 'There is nothing like leather.'

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Everything Midas touched was turned into gold. Everything Prussia looks at is transformed into some sort of soldiers' equipment or withers away. Surely that is a nightmare. Hence the disgust and revulsion which many contemporaries felt when they saw Prussia rise. They shuddered. I shall quote only one remark. Johann Heinrich Winkelmann said: 'I'd rather be a Turkish eunuch than a Prussian.'

### III

#### FREDERICK THE GREAT AND THE PRUSSIAN LEGEND

MARIA THERESA used to refer to Frederick II as 'the wicked man'. The empress was right. There was something inhuman and evil in Frederick's nature; he lacked qualities which normal men possess and this deficiency was all the more conspicuous and even slightly repugnant as it went together with remarkable gifts and talents. Frederick can be compared in many ways with his namesake, Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, the great emperor of the Middle Ages, whom his contemporaries called '*stupor mundi*'. He, too, was a neglected child in the days when he was loitering in the streets of Palermo and kind people give him food. He, too, grew up into a man who felt nowhere at home except in his work and royal duties—but that is a frosty abode. Frederick of Prussia was in the same position. He belonged to no nation and to no creed, he had no family and no real friends. He seems to have known nothing but substitutes for human happiness. This King has perhaps influenced the course of German history more than anybody else, but he was certainly quite out of touch with Germany's national life. He took some interest in it but it was more the interest of a patronizing foreigner. His essay on German literature—a well-arranged arsenal of wrong judgements—his conversations with Gellert, many of his letters make that clear. He spoke broken-German. French was his real language and his tastes and culture were French. But this did not turn him into a Frenchman; therefore it remains true that Frederick was strangely detached from both nations like a wanderer between two worlds. But was he really without friends? Was not Sans-Souci famous for its spirit of conviviality? All his so-called friendships with authors and intellectuals (most of them Frenchmen) can be safely left out of account; he enjoyed their witticisms and their many brilliant gifts, but there was little personal attachment. The letters often reveal contempt. The King, like his father, did not think very much of scribblers. They were his buffoons. He treated his generals and officers with more respect but the gulf between him and men like Ziethen was wide. Women played no part in his life. What he proudly called his philosophy was rather second-rate and cheap. His letters and poetry are full of it. Most of these thoughts and opinions which

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he never tired of reiterating, express fatigue and weary contempt, but he must have found some relief and consolation in writing them down. He knew nothing better and more substantial to which he could turn. But what attracted the attention of the world were not the secrets of his personality but his military genius and the ruthless character of his foreign policy. This is not the place to discuss Frederick's strategy, but something must be said about his political principles.

Frederick is not the first Machiavellian ruler in history nor can he be called the wolf among sheep. When he launched his attack on Austria in 1740, breaking the promises which his father had solemnly given, France was only too ready to join his side, though she was bound by exactly the same obligations. Frederick's cynicism was excessive. In November 1740 he wrote to his minister, Podewils, whilst everything was ready to invade Silesia: 'The question of right is the affair of the ministers, it is your affair. Go ahead with it, for the orders to the troops have been given.' And at another time he remarked: 'If there is anything to be gained by being honest, let us be honest; if it is necessary to deceive, let us deceive.' That is clear language. Such were his principles. Frederick alone is responsible for the war of the Austrian succession. The Seven Years' War, however, is a more complicated affair and the scholars differ. War preparations were being made on both sides. Europe was lining up for battle, Prussia and England against France, Austria and Russia—the Kaunitz coalition. It is possible that Frederick struck because he believed his enemies were not quite ready. Other historians maintain that he launched a purely aggressive war (presumably in order to gain Saxony) and was entirely taken by surprise when the Kaunitz coalition became effective and worked. We must leave this problem undecided. The Seven Years' War has an importance which is not affected by such debatable points. This war created the Prussian legend, the story of *Fredericus Rex*, the great Captain, who managed to resist the whole of Europe. After seven years of bitter fighting the invincible King was still hanging on with dwindling forces among the hills of Saxony and Silesia; in the end Europe gave in. Frederick William I had never dared to expose his beloved army to the dangers of a major war, under Frederick the Great the Prussian Army fought the battles of Hohenfriedberg, Prague, Rossbach, Leuthen and Torgau, a series of mighty achievements which only Napoleon has been able to surpass. The Prussian legend certainly simplifies the

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outline of the whole event; England's subsidies which kept Prussia going and Russia's unexpected withdrawal from the war (Frederick called it 'the miracle of the House of Brandenburg') are facts which popular tradition overlooks. The King and his brave troops did the thing—that is what people believed.

The attack of Frederick the Great on Austria was from the German point of view disastrous. Frederick did not actually split the German nation, but he made the first successful steps in that direction. The real conflict of patriotic loyalties was still to come. Goethe describes in his autobiography (Book II) how the peace of his home was disturbed and upset by the events of the war and by the disagreement which arose among the members of the family. It is, of course, quite wrong to believe that German public opinion sided spontaneously with Prussia against Austria. The Imperial House of Austria—that was Germany. The King of Prussia was a rebel, but even rebels can win admiration. The idea that Prussia might replace Austria and lead the German nation was quite foreign to the eighteenth century—nobody dreamt of it. More than a hundred years had to pass before this idea became a political factor to be seriously considered. The fact that Austria's political interests were more and more concentrated on spheres outside Germany strengthened the pro-Prussian party during the nineteenth century. But even then the opposition was still strong. Prussia's success under Frederick the Great prepared the ground out of which the conflict of patriotic loyalties arose. This was fatal for Germany.

There is another famous passage in Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (Book VII) referring to the inspiration which Prussia's military triumph gave to German literature. Goethe wrote: 'Frederick the Great and the deeds of the Seven Years' War provided German poetry with the first true and worthy subject (*Lebensgehalt*). For any national literature must become tasteless if it is not based on the very foundations of human life, on the deeds of nations and their leaders.' An amazing statement, written by the greatest German poet, who, however, never availed himself of that source of inspiration which he recommends! The examples that Goethe gives to prove his thesis are quite unconvincing. He mentions three names—Gleim, Ramler, and Lessing's 'Minna von Barnhelm'. These works cannot claim to have given new life and inspiration to German literature as a whole. They are insignificant compared with Klopstock's influence. It seems that Goethe's judgement was misled by his



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political inclinations. The strong pro-Prussian sympathies of his father affected him when he wrote these lines, the glorification of Frederick was one of his childhood memories. Goethe was never a Prussian partisan himself, on the contrary, he was one of those Germans who were quite prepared to accept Napoleon's domination of Europe as an inevitable and (on the whole) beneficial event. I have quoted the passage to show how strong the impression was which Prussia made, not on literature but on the whole German nation.

The Seven Years' War produced some war propaganda, nothing of course that could be compared with modern requirements. But one element of this propaganda has (until recently) been incorporated into the Prussian Legend and must therefore be carefully examined. It is the claim that Prussia is the champion of Protestantism. When Frederick was trying to win England's support in 1741, he posed as the defender of the Protestant minority in Silesia. He wrote to King George II: 'I place unbounded confidence in Your Majesty's friendship and in the common interests of Protestant Princes which require that those oppressed for their religion should be succoured.' This was a false pretence. Frederick himself did not care for Protestantism. He was an atheist, or to put it more correctly, a deist. God was—according to the fashionable rationalist philosophy—an idea; many believed a necessary idea, but he was not a living reality seriously to be reckoned with. Frederick stood for religious toleration. He said: 'In my kingdom everybody may seek salvation as suits him best.' The proper interpretation of these words is: 'Who really cares nowadays about salvation? Let old-fashioned folk get on with it if they choose to.' This attitude was very frequent among educated people. But it is neither Protestant nor Catholic. Frederick's personal convictions, however, are irrelevant; he certainly was a scoffer and not a 'Protestant hero' (he was called so in England), but Prussianism might be, in spite of this, the true outcome of Protestantism. This is the problem we must now consider.

It has often been said that Luther's theology produced an attitude of docile submission to the State. The fact that Luther, in 1525, sided with the Princes against the peasants is supposed to prove that the reformer used his influence to support the enemies of civic liberty. All this over-simplifies and therefore obscures a complicated situation. We had better ask: What was Luther's opinion about the relations between Christian religion and the

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State? We find it clearly expressed in his book, *On secular authority and the limits of obedience* (1523). He never changed his outlook. The gist of his argument is this: Secular authority has got its power from God and must be obeyed. Luther frequently refers to St. Paul's letter to the Romans, Chapter xiii. Complaints may be raised, but rebellion is always wrong and sinful. This point is strongly emphasized. It seems, therefore, that there are no limits of obedience according to Luther. But there are. Luther maintains that whenever religion is affected, disobedience becomes not a right but a duty. Nor was this only on paper. Without this readiness for adamant resistance Protestantism would never have become a force in history. Luther's own life story is ample proof. The question arises: where must we draw the line? When is religion affected? The answer is: Such a line cannot be drawn beforehand. The moment a Christian Church is prepared to accept a well-defined sphere of influence, outside which it is not her business to go, she has surrendered to the State, she has become the religious State department. Luther has made it quite clear that he would consider a capitulation of that kind a betrayal. The test is: you will not find any attempt in Luther's writings to draw the line of demarcation between religion and politics. Pope Pius X, re-stating the Catholic doctrine of 'indirect power' declared in 1903: 'We do not conceal the fact that we shall shock some people by saying that we must necessarily concern ourselves with politics. The supreme Pontiff can in no wise violently separate the category of politics from the supreme control of faith and morals entrusted to him.' Lutheranism accepts the principle which the Pope proclaims, but it denies that it is the Pope's function to be the guardian of faith and morals and to direct the campaign against the intruding State. The denial of papal authority is an affair of great magnitude, but it does not concern us here. We must stress the point which Papists and Lutherans have in common; they both believe in the Christian duty of disobedience, but one cannot say in advance when it will arise. The thesis that Lutheranism encourages men to accept the unchallengeable supremacy of the State must therefore be rejected. Servility may pretend to be the true guardian of Protestant inheritance—such claims are wrong. There is no link between Protestantism and unlimited obedience to the State. It is worth remembering that it was Protestant Christianity which rallied first and opposed the Nazi Régime. The opposition was neither organized nor planned; the official leaders had already

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surrendered when laymen and parsons rose and took up the challenge.

In the second chapter of this book I have tried to give an analysis of the Prussian mentality. Both principles and methods of Prussia were strange and unique, not quite in keeping with ordinary traditional standards. Presumably, Frederick William I would have strongly protested if somebody had said to him that his state and its principles were hardly compatible with Christian religion. He thought that he was a very good Christian himself. But should the King's confidence affect our judgement? Let us apply the test.

Frederick William certainly drew a line of demarcation between State and religion. He wrote: 'People must serve their King with body and life, with their property, their honour and their conscience, they must be ready to sacrifice everything except their eternal bliss, which is left to God, but everything else belongs to me.' Small, indeed, was the domain which the King of Prussia was prepared to reserve for God in this world! 'Everything belongs to me!' Though Frederick William was far away from the total prison of the totalitarian state, one must say that he had some vision of it, perhaps not quite a clear picture, but the appetite was there. Such visions and appetites, however, do not proceed from Christian sources. Had Christian conscience been fully alive, trained and disciplined, then a thing like Prussia could not have developed. Prussia needs a dormant Christianity (inside and outside her country) in order to push ahead. To call her Protestant is misleading.

If a general reason be looked for to explain continental absolutism, its rigidity and the corresponding acquiescence of the people, it is, I think, the exhaustion and fatigue following the religious wars which must be considered. In Germany the Thirty Years' War and its devastations go far in explaining the readiness of the population to accept the rule of absolute monarchs and princes. This gruesome war taught men to cower, and whoever reads the rich contemporary evidence, the chronicles and other records of the time will readily admit that such an experience must have left its trace. It seems unlikely that the Prussian system built up by Frederick William I would have lasted. Nor could it expand. It was, on the whole, too unattractive. But Frederick the Great gave Prussia glamour. Without her legend Prussia would have failed. No wonder, therefore, that the tomb of Frederick, in Potsdam, has become some kind of Prussian shrine.

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Frederick was a legendary figure whilst he was still alive. As such he was loved, not as a real living person. Men withdrew from the scoffer who despised the human race. The later years of his life were spent in utter loneliness. The gang of jesters had vanished; Sans-Souci was a deserted palace. When Frederick died, only a footman was present.

## IV

### PRUSSIA IN NAPOLEONIC TIMES: THE STAGE OF HOPE

WE start our investigations with the battle of Jena-Auerstädt (1806). It is not necessary for our purpose to follow the course of Prussian policy in the period between the death of Frederick the Great (1786) and Prussia's first contest with Napoleon, which ended in so unexpected and ignominious a defeat. The Prussian State of Frederick William I and his great successor collapsed. The breakdown was not only complete, it was disgraceful. Disloyalty, desertion, cowardice, confusion were the marks of this event. Napoleon's scorn was fully justified—he despised his Prussian opponent. Prussia displayed a similar weakness in 1918. The remark General Gröner made to the embarrassed Kaiser at the critical moment of approaching defeat: 'The oath of allegiance is under such circumstances sheer fiction', reveals a deficiency of military morale. We can well understand the feelings of the indignant war lord. For what is the use of an oath of allegiance if it loses its binding power the very moment the situation becomes critical and bleak? In 1918, Prussia was spared another Jena because the armistice was concluded before the military catastrophe, which was imminent, could take the form of a decisive defeat. Marshal Foch, in the woods of Compiègne, must have felt that the great victory which would have made his name immortal, was snatched away from him; that explains the angry welcome he gave to the German delegation. The schoolboys who have to learn by heart the battles of the Great War never come across the Kaiser's Waterloo. Such a thing does not seem to exist. Therefore it was possible for the Germans to nourish the strange illusion and self-deception that they had actually never lost the war but more or less won it! This despicable legend, which made German regeneration practically impossible, was widely accepted in post-war Germany. It became one of the main propaganda stunts of the growing opposition.

In 1806 the situation was different. The Prussian armies were routed. Napoleon knocked the whole state to pieces. The general impression was that Prussia's career as a great power had come to an end. This was certainly the idea of the Prussian negotiator, Field-Marshal Kalkreuth, who concluded the peace with Napoleon

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in Tilsit. The treaty of Tilsit was harsher than the treaty of Versailles. And Napoleon seems to have contemplated even more—the complete annihilation of Prussia. Presumably the Tsar prevented this, but we need not go into the details of this complicated affair, about which scholars hold very different views. Contemporaries did not think it impossible that Prussia should disappear or be reduced for ever to a state of political insignificance. Consider the novelty of this Prussian thing! In 1806 old men (all of those over sixty years) remembered a state of affairs when Prussia had not counted as one of the great European powers. Herder remarked that the State of Frederick the Great would vanish like the Kingdom of Pyrrhus, without leaving a trace. But what actually happened was this: In spite of a treaty which, I repeat, by far exceeded Versailles in severity, Prussia rose again. Six years after the battle of Jena she was capable of displaying considerable military and moral strength, she took a decisive part in the defeat of Napoleon. How was this resurrection possible? What was its nature? This is the problem which the present chapter sets out to explain.

The answer to this question can be stated briefly in one sentence: Prussia was saved by non-Prussians, she was saved by Germany, who managed to transform her temporarily into a truly German state. The Prussian resurrection of 1807–12 was actually no resurrection at all, it was a transformation or the beginning of it. The whole event can be called a defeat of Prussia inside Germany—the ‘taming of the shrew’.

Such is the magnitude of the enterprise that it places the statesman, who nearly achieved the transformation of Prussia, Karl Freiherr vom Stein, among the greatest men of German history. Nor does it diminish his fame that he failed in the end—his work did not last. Stein was no Prussian. He was born in Nassau. Hardenberg, his main collaborator, came from Hanover, so did General Scharnhorst, who reorganized the Prussian Army; the father of Gneisenau, the great strategist, had fought against Frederick the Great in the Seven Years’ War, and Field-Marshal Blücher was born in Mecklenburg. Ernst Moritz Arndt, who may be called the publicist of this political group, was from Rügen of peasant stock; his grandfather had been a Swede by birth. Why were these men prepared to serve Prussia and why did they still believe in Prussia’s future when everybody else seemed to have given up hope? They had various firm convictions. First they believed that Napoleon’s

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domination of Europe must not be accepted as an irrevocable fact. They refused to be overwhelmed by his amazing success. They rejected the common belief in his invincibility, in spite of the glories of Bonaparte's Italian and Egyptian campaigns, in spite of Marengo, Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena and Friedland! Secondly, they believed that the war of liberation which was bound to come needed Prussia's co-operation. But the reform of Prussia had to come first. And this brings us to the third point. They believed, lastly, that there should be no such thing as Prussian patriotism. Their patriotism was German, nourished by rich and ancient traditions, which Stein and his friends knew and loved, whereas Prussia, as we have seen, was out of contact with this inheritance. 'I have only one fatherland, it is Germany,' wrote Stein in December 1812. And Arndt's writings make it quite clear it was not Prussia which he wanted to see established again (he made some very bitter remarks about Frederick the Great), he worked for the regeneration of Germany. His most important and effective, though not his best book, was called *The Spirit of the Time*. Arndt's attractive personality is clearly revealed in his autobiography (1840). This peasant's son had given a great deal of thought to agricultural problems. Everything he has to say about this subject deserves full attention. His poetry is not of a high order but the verdict of contempt which the German high-brows have given is quite out of place.

Der Gott der Eisen wachsen liess,  
der wollte keine Knechte.

That is not a feeble line. Let Arndt's critics write a better one.

It cannot be our task to examine in detail Stein's legislation. But the guiding principle must be mentioned. Instead of subjects he wanted citizens. Stein's reform was meant to bring about this transformation. Citizens think, or ought to. They consider themselves guardians of the common cause, they might even raise the banner of revolt like Danton in 1792, who overthrew by force the 'Austrian Committee', commonly called the French Monarchy, because he felt the country would lose the war if the King stayed in power. Citizens are always potential rebels. Great indeed, therefore, was the change which Stein and his friends contemplated. Was not obedience the primary Prussia virtue? Stein himself was a disobedient and difficult man. Independent people often are. In 1807 (before Tilsit) Frederick William III appointed him a member of the government. Stein would not

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take office unless the King dismissed one of his private councillors. The King, infuriated, dismissed Stein instead. He wrote an extremely ungracious letter which contained the passage: 'I consider you an obstreperous, stubborn, defiant and disobedient civil servant, who, relying on his gifts and talents, allows himself to yield to personal animosities and hatred. . . . I should like to add that if you are not prepared to change your disrespectful and unseemly behaviour the State cannot be expected to make further use of your service.' Circumstances were stronger than the King's anger. A few months later he called the 'disobedient' and 'obstreperous' man back. The rebel saved Prussia.

The idea of citizenship applied to the Army led to an important innovation: conscription. It was not introduced until the outbreak of war in 1813. The opposition was formidable. Niebuhr wrote: 'Only wild enthusiasts ('Schwärmer') can accept this idea, hostile to civilization and hatched by uncouth captains.' Another contemporary German critic called conscription 'the tomb of civilization, science, civil liberties and human happiness'. People suspected that the spirit of the French Revolution was entering the country. Up to a certain point they were right. For the French Revolution had not only brought about the *levée en masse*, the most important military change had been a change in quality. The army of the people, once the initial stages of disorder had been overcome, turned out to be superior to the well-drilled battalions of the Kings. This, surely, could be neither denied nor safely overlooked. Democracy was getting a foothold in Prussia. The war of liberation, which the Prussian reformers planned, was going to be a hard job. Success was impossible unless the whole nation supported it. Great wars always strengthen democracy, though the word be unknown. The formidable task ahead—to fight the greatest soldier of the time, who had become the despot of Europe—gave the opportunity to change Prussia, which was a task of even greater moment.

Stein's work bore fruit. In 1812, when Napoleon invaded Russia, the King of Prussia was forced to become his ally. After the great catastrophe had occurred, the German patriots felt that the moment for action had come. Not so the King. He hesitated. The commander of the Prussian contingent serving under French command was General York, a man opposed to Scharnhorst's reform. But so much had the spirit of Prussia changed that York took a step which is unique in Prussian history. He concluded



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an armistice with the Russians on the 30th of December 1812. This was desertion, but at the same time the responsible action of a patriotic citizen.

The convention of Tauroggen—as this armistice was called—gave the signal for the war of liberation. The nations of Europe rose.

The idea of citizenship, however, is not sufficient to give a true picture of what I have called the transformation of Prussia. We must take a broader view of this event. Civilized men were in charge of Prussian affairs. The spirit of contemporary Germany began to penetrate into Prussia. Wilhelm von Humboldt was Minister of Education. In 1810 the University of Berlin was founded. Let us examine the nature of that influence which spread from Germany to Prussia. Never again did the tide flow in this direction.

During Napoleonic times German literature reached a high stage of maturity and perfection, commonly called the 'classical period'. The most representative authors were Goethe and Schiller. Both happened to live in Weimar, drawn there by an enlightened Prince; that is why we talk of the Weimar tradition. It would be wrong to regard the Weimar tradition as a purely literary affair. We are not concerned here with its high literary quality and value; we have to estimate its spiritual significance. For the great authors and poets of the classical period have deeply influenced the German philosophy of life, the general attitude towards life as a whole. We must, of course, discriminate. Goethe himself said to Eckermann, that his works could never be popular, and he was right. Only a few poems, like the 'Heideröslein', the 'Erlkönig' and the 'Zauberlehrling' have been absorbed into the living tradition of the whole nation. With Schiller it was different. School education made him its favourite poet. Schiller's dramas, notably 'Wilhelm Tell' and his ballads, and the great poem 'die Glocke' have become very popular indeed. Whether the school has been, on the whole, a competent and helpful interpreter of Schiller's genius may well be doubted. I fear the general effect was to make him cheap and to give the impression (which is quite wrong) that Schiller is primarily a poet for young people and has no real appeal to mature minds. However this may be—the poet we must chiefly discuss now is Goethe. The effect he had on Germany was immense, because he influenced the educated classes not only in matters of taste but in matters of general importance. He did not influence, as I said before, the whole

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nation. Goethe's influence lasted right through the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century it began to fade away. Nietzsche's star rose. But the elder generation of to-day, men over sixty, still represent the tradition of the educated *bourgeoisie*. Goethe is their guide in many ways, though they feel that the world has taken a different course than he would have approved of. They regret this, but they think that nothing is to be done about it. They are fatalists. Goethe's influence may be summed up thus: he provided a substitute for religion and became the symbol of a very refined and subdued rejection of Christianity. That was his effect. His own attitude to Christianity is, however, a very complicated problem. The first general impression is that he stands in opposition. There are remarks which are bitterly hostile, even abusive. Such remarks, however, are rare. On the whole, Goethe adopts an attitude of indifference tinged with contempt. He wrote: 'Whosoever possesses science and art is also religious; those who have neither should have a religion.' Here we have in a nutshell the *bourgeois* philosophy. The traditional religion has been discarded, truly educated men no longer need it but let the populace get on with it. Goethe was too great a man to leave the whole problem like that. As time went on he realized more and more clearly that the dissolution of religious tradition was a grave danger and that neither artistic refinement nor scientific progress would be able to cure the evils thus produced. In his last great novel, *Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre* (1829), he seeks for a remedy and advocates a 'religion of respect' (*Ehrfurcht*) which contains Christian elements, though strangely diluted, but on the whole it is his own creation and a rather precarious one. The profundity of the book deserves, of course, a much closer examination, but I only mention it here as a sign that Goethe was fully aware of the problems which the disappearance of religion entails. It is superficial to call Goethe a pagan. As a young man he was in closest contact with living tradition, intensely attracted by it in many ways. But he recoiled. His autobiography gives a most interesting account of his religious development. The turning point came when he studied at Leipzig University. At that time he freed himself from Christian fetters (*Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Book VII). Nevertheless, as an old man, he gave his picture as a present in return to the brothers Boisserée, the collectors of medieval art. They had sent him a reproduction of some old painting, the Adoration of the Magi, and Goethe added these verses:

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Der Abgebildete  
vergleicht sich billig  
heilgem Dreikönige,  
dieweil er willig  
dem Stern der ostenher  
wahrhaft erschienen,  
auf allen Wegen war  
bereit zu dienen.

(He who is here portrayed, rightly compares himself to the holy Wise Man: because he has always been ready on all his ways to serve the star which truly arose from the east.)

We should weigh these words written by a most sincere man who never made a false statement about himself and who has called all his writings a 'confession'.

But the fact remains—and this is the only one which concerns us now—that Goethe's influence among the educated classes worked for the dissolution of Christian traditions. The importance of the issue involved demands further explanation. I choose a famous passage from *Faust*.

Dr. Faust has come back from his walk with his *famulus* and settles down in his study. He begins to translate the New Testament.

'Tis writ: 'In the beginning was the word!'  
I pause, perplex'd! who now will help afford?  
I cannot the mere word so highly prize,  
I must translate it otherwise,  
if by the spirit guided as I read.  
'In the beginning was the Sense!' Take heed,  
the import of this primal sentence weigh,  
lest thy too hasty pen be led astray!  
Is force creative then of Sense the dower?  
'In the beginning was the Power!'  
Thus should it stand: yet, while the line I trace,  
a something warns me, once more to efface.  
The spirit aids! from anxious scruples freed  
I write: 'In the beginning was the Deed!'

Two points deserve our attention. First, the unseemly ease with which this translator sets about. Can there be anything more superficial? Does the Gospel of St. John refer to a 'mere word'? Is that the meaning of *Logos*? Christian philosophy is just brushed aside as if it had never existed. And what is put in its place? What is the philosophy which stands behind the

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'improved' version: 'In the beginning was the Deed'? It can be stated thus: action is superior to meditation. But this is nothing less than a complete reversal of the most important principle which underlies the whole system of Christian thought and which has moulded our civilization. Christianity proclaims the superiority of meditative life, which is the source of all sound action. When Martha complained about her sister, Christ did not say to Mary: 'Get up quickly and lay the table!' His answer was: 'Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful. Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.'

The second point which we must consider is the devastating influence which the 'philosophy of action' was bound to have. When the dynamic forces of Prussia and Capitalism began to enter the life of the nation, this philosophy provided justification and assurance. 'Action is what we need. Let us go ahead.' Thus Germany was wrecked. Oswald Spengler, the champion of industrialism and at the same time the prophet of doom, praised Faust as the great symbol of European civilization. A 'Faustean character' is, according to Spengler, a type who strives unceasingly and restlessly with indomitable energy. His mind knows no repose, no place to anchor. This insatiability, we are told, is the soul of Europe. Former generations would have called it, tentatively, damnation. Spengler declares that only power-politics and industry can be regarded as worthy modern aspirations; all other things have died. He tries to frighten young people away from poetry and painting, like sparrows from the cherries. He does so with great self-confidence. The stern and pompous philosopher seems to have forgotten that scarecrows are sometimes tossed aside and then lie in the mud, quite helpless and unnoticed. Spengler frequently refers to the last scenes of *Faust* (second part). There we see Faust as a great employer, ruthlessly destroying human happiness in the pursuit of his grand schemes. Spengler considers these scenes an inspiring symbol of European future. What we are discussing now is perhaps not the essence of Goethe's work and teaching. Call it a side-line if you like but it remains true that the Weimar tradition was dangerously detached from the roots and basis of our common inheritance. The educated classes, who keenly absorbed this literature, received for the time being the benefit of aesthetic refinement, but in the long run the effect turned out to be negative.

When circumstances offered the unique chance of incorporating

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Prussia into the German nation it was the culture of the 'classical period' which was Germany's missionary force. 'Weimar' was at that time dominating the minds of educated people. No wonder But it was unable to replace the older and richer traditions (including religion) above which it had risen with an unjustified feeling of superiority. Real strength, however, can only proceed from the deepest sources of our inheritance.

Stein and most of his friends, notably Arndt, were in actual fact more deeply rooted in the past than the great classical poets. They were Christians. We have to admit that Arndt is nothing more than an ordinary man compared with Goethe's genius. But gifts are not decisive in such matters. The son of the Rügen peasant was more at home in Germany than the son of the Frankfurt patrician. The Prussian reformers were politicians. They forced Prussia into the political system and orbit of the German nation—Prussia bowed to Germany's superiority—they could do no more. The full transformation of Prussia failed because the Weimar tradition, in spite of its beauty, had no contact with the deeper layers of tradition. Another reason for its failure was, strangely enough, Austria's policy after 1815. This will be considered in Chapter VI.

I should like to conclude this chapter with some remarks about the thesis advocated by Catholic historians and apologists, authors like Hilaire Belloc in England, Henri Massis in France, Theodor Haecker in Germany. I mention Belloc, *Europe and the Faith* (1920), *The Crisis of our Civilization* (1937); Massis, *Defence of the Occident*; Th. Haecker, *What is Man?* (1933), and *Virgil, Father of Europe* (1931). Haecker's books are most remarkable. They defend the German tradition, which is older than Prussia and the Reich. They not only defend it, they represent it. The 'Widerstand' Nihilists, who may one day become the Jacobins of the Nazi Revolution (see Chapter X), recognize Haecker as their true antagonist, for he knows that Germany will either remain a part of Christendom or perish. The Nihilists hold the opposite view. The Catholic authors maintain that the crisis of our civilization, all the glaring evils which surround us, are due to the fact that 'heresy' has won through. It is, therefore, logical to conclude, as these men do, that restoration can only be brought about if Europe returns to the Catholic faith. I think there is a great deal of truth in this analysis of our present situation. I go further; there is, as far as I know, no other thesis which covers the whole ground of the problem and is equally consistent.

## PRUSSIA IN NAPOLEONIC TIMES

Tradition is the true source of strength and the Christian religion is its core. People outside the Roman Church, however, will not be prepared to identify the Christian religion with the Roman Catholic Church. The reasons cannot be discussed here. We can limit our present discussion to one point of controversy; the problem of restoration. It is, unfortunately, by no means impossible that the deterioration of Europe will not be checked. A solution might be accepted which would transform Christendom into something quite different from what it used to be. The antheap of society, which was mentioned in the first chapter of this book, might become a reality. The Roman Church may then still exist, but its transforming power, so I believe, would have gone. Torn away from the rich texture of the ancient tradition and dragged into an alien world, Catholic religion is bound to wither and to absorb the miasmal elements of the new atmosphere. This is not sheer guesswork. We know from experience that Catholicism can be forced into a very unpleasant and unconvincing shape by uncongenial surroundings. The style of *Sacré Cœur* and all it stands for can no longer be considered a welcome manifestation of European tradition and certainly not a force from which restoration is likely to proceed. The Catholic Church, clothed in machine-made ugliness and reduced to the bare minimum of existence, its formulated doctrine, is in the grips of deterioration herself. The life and devotion must be tinged with the God-forsaken barbarity of the whole exterior. Religions, as we all know, can go on existing after they have ceased to function. The doctrine is still taught and—so it seems—accepted; the rites, the customs, the ceremonies, the paraphernalia, remain. There seems hardly any change at all, but the old words and terms sound hollow; dullness creeps in and takes the lustre away from things that once stirred and invigorated the hearts of men. The life of religion does not dwell in its bare doctrine, though doctrine is the source from which this life originally sprang.

It is the profound poetical spell of religion, the complexity of its symbolism, that exercises the great transforming influence in ages when religious guidance is accepted. The great elemental facts of daily life—birth and death, light and darkness, hope and anxiety—are thus interpreted and brought out of their isolation into a whole system of thought and life, a vast conception with a rhythm of its own. A great reconciliation is achieved; Man accepts his lot and amidst all strife he can repose. The poetry of religion is based—like all poetry—on the richness of its

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associations. There is presumably no other book that has influenced the spiritual life of Christianity more profoundly than the Psalter. The psalms are inexhaustible because they combine powerful finality of statement with great adaptability to varying circumstances and needs. The reader contributes; the words he reads wake memories and associations often of a very personal nature, it is like the variation of a musical theme. The same applies to Church liturgy. It is hardly effective in itself; its hints and allusions need the response of men still saturated with the full life of tradition. The service, the liturgy, the theological doctrine cannot be a substitute for this life, and there is no indication that they can recreate it, once it is gone.

Restoration is a process of great complexity. It is a healing process. Many forces have to contribute, and about one point we can be sure; unless we preserve we shall never be able to restore. If destruction has its way unchallenged, the stage may be reached where health cannot be regained—too much of it has gone already. And it is from the cells, which are still unaffected by disease, that the healing flow proceeds. The next chapter will be devoted to the great economic and social changes which took place in the nineteenth century affecting the life of all nations.

## THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

THE industrial revolution developed very differently in different countries. It overtook England like a flood, in Germany the process was more gradual. Hence the fact that the term is not used in Germany, but the effects were the same everywhere, though there is a difference in degree which might be—in certain cases—all-important. What is the nature of these effects? I shall deal with them under five headings:

1. The unsettling effect on agriculture
2. The destruction of handicraft
3. The abuse of private property
4. The dissolution of the family
5. The mobilization of new energies.

1. *The unsettling effect on agriculture.*

The deterioration of English rural life has gone far beyond anything Germany ever experienced. There were special reasons for that. In Germany there is still a peasantry, living and nowadays struggling hard on its soil and exposed to very different conditions, but the peasant class has not yet disappeared. The villages have not yet been urbanized. In the north and the east large estates prevail. In these districts, which were 'colonial soil', the structure of agricultural life is quite different. This is due to historical reasons which cannot be discussed here. The big commercial and industrial centres are not dominating the whole country; their power, however, and sphere of influence are steadily growing. I give some figures:

About the middle of the eighteenth century roughly 30% of Prussia's population lived in towns (most of them very small); 70% in the country. Not until the end of the nineteenth century did real changes occur. Then the towns began to grow rapidly. In 1871 they represented 32.4%; 1885, 37.2%; 1895, 40% of the population. And the whole of Germany underwent similar changes. Between 1871 and 1900 the population grew from 40 millions to 56 millions. But the rural population which in 1882 had amounted to 26.3 millions consisted in 1895 of only 25.9 millions. At the end of the century 50% of the German population lived in towns. Round about 1830 80% of the German nation



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were peasants and farmers; in 1882 only 40%, and at the end of the century the numbers were considerably smaller still, approaching 20%. The increase of town population was:

	1850	1900
Berlin . . .	419,000	1,889,000
Munich . . .	110,000	500,000
Leipzig . . .	63,000	456,000

These figures clearly show the steady increase of industry. The centres of modern production were beginning to absorb the country.

But agriculture was not only reduced, it was unsettled. It became commercialized. At the beginning of the nineteenth century all European countries, with the exception of England, Holland, and Scandinavia, were growing their own food. The increasing population, the new wealth of industry and the modern means of transport altered the situation; the products of foreign soils were made accessible, the peasants and farmers had to struggle against a competition hitherto unknown. This competition was not merely the diligence of foreign peasants toiling in far-away countries and the fertility of American or Russian soil, it was also the financial power of international trade which was directing the permanent flow of imports. The men who controlled this trade were in actual fact more important personages for a peasant and his family than his own King or Emperor, though he did not know who they were, and might not even have understood the language they spoke. Peasantry needed help. The tariff policy of the Government brought some relief and was again and again able to lessen the pressure considerably, though there was, of course, always a strong opposition to such policy, led by the spokesmen of industrial interests who demanded cheap bread. This kind of struggle is familiar to all industrial nations and we know what intensity the contest can assume. More important and influential was the help which finance offered: credit. The moneylender began to control agriculture to such a degree that the village community, its methods of production, its way of life, were deeply affected. The agricultural production will always find itself in a particularly unfavourable position when roped into the system of credit which is the basis of industrial enterprise. Too many factors which are outside human control contribute to the farmer's success or failure. How can he ever hope to compete with the industrialist or trader in

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drawing benefit from a credit given to him under the same conditions? He will toil and struggle in vain against such odds and become the victim of usury. The first severe agricultural crisis in Germany came to a head about the middle of the nineteenth century. There followed a period of relief, due to a growing demand for food. It was the era when German industry began to develop. The problem of agricultural credit was also successfully tackled.

Raiffeisen founded his *landwirtschaftliche Kreditgenossenschaft*, the farmers were encouraged to associate and to help themselves. We need not follow the ups and downs of this development in detail. Let this much be said: Rural Germany has not been destroyed by the industrial revolution; it managed to adapt itself but it was forced into a precarious situation which is not without danger and certainly full of difficulties.

### 2. *The destruction of handicraft.*

Throughout the centuries of its long history, in all civilizations and ages, Mankind had always lived in a man-made world. Houses, clothes, arms—they were all made by hand. Hence their beauty. The charcoal-burner who ate his soup from an earthen bowl, and the king who drank his 'blude red wine' out of a golden goblet, they were both surrounded by nothing but man-made things. The skill and traditions of handicraft are the mark of all civilizations. The artisan is the truly civilized man. If we walk through one of our museums where the furniture of the past, the implements of daily life, pottery, clothes, tapestry, etc., are exhibited, and enter one of the rooms fully furnished right down to the smallest detail, we are struck by the never-failing beauty of all we see. All this has gone. Only rich men can afford nowadays to surround themselves with some old furniture, should it appeal to their taste; so we might find an Austrian peasant's wardrobe in the drawing-room of an American banker. It is an exhibit which happens to be in a private house and not in the museum next door.

The breakdown of handicraft and its ancient living traditions was the result of the industrial revolution. Machine-made things replaced the works of the artisan. The rapidity and thoroughness of the change have often been remarked upon. Many contemporaries who saw the thing happen fully realized the gravity of the event and most of its implications. It is worth noting that this

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side of the industrial revolution was understood better in all its significance than the other consequences. Artists and men of artistic temperament gave the alarm first. Again in England things had gone further than in Germany. The ugliness of Capitalism and its ruthless barbarism had become more conspicuous in this island than anywhere else. Where industry established itself beauty went. No need to go into further details. The facts are only too familiar. But three points should be stressed. First, the spiritual consequence of the event. Beauty is a spiritual force. Capitalism has exiled men to a machine-made world of extreme ugliness; this world is a prison for millions; they cannot escape; nature is not allowed to enter. Children grow up, go through life and die without ever having seen a cornfield. (Statistical evidence has been collected in Berlin about this and similar points.) This is not sentimental; such facts are grave.

Secondly, the curtailment of responsibility. The artisan is responsible for his work and its quality. He makes a whole thing. The industrial worker does not; he has himself rather become a tool. Thus he has been reduced, as Eric Gill puts it, to 'a state of sub-human irresponsibility'. I refer the reader to Gill's books. He states the case clearly. This evil cannot be cured through higher wages, good housing conditions and improved nutrition. It cannot be counteracted as Utopians have believed, by hobbies and spare-time activities. For it seems evident that the degrading stupidity of their work has an exhausting effect on men—the nature of their pleasures and recreations must correspond to the level of their work; there are exceptions, but they hardly count.

Thirdly, the emancipation of art. The destruction of handicraft, the fall of the artisan, put art into a most precarious position. In an industrial world art is utterly isolated and cut off. This process of emancipation started with the Renaissance. Misled by a wrong philosophy, the artists themselves, who had been nothing but artisans in medieval society, insisted on being more—the exodus of the artists began. It is outside the scope of this book to deal with this important subject, and the many subtle causes which gradually brought about the strange and deadly isolation of modern art. The Industrial Revolution is not responsible for this isolation, but the dehumanized character of Capitalist society made it patent how far things had gone, and it accelerated the process. The artist is homeless in modern society; he has no longer a function except to please the rich and a small clique of

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connoisseurs and art critics. He has become the pekinese of the wealthy.

### 3. *The abuse of private property.*

Distributed property had been the mark of European society throughout the centuries. Capitalism changed this. Accumulated wealth in the hands of a small minority and the existence of a large and ever-growing class of people without property are the well-known characteristics of the capitalist system. Thus society, utterly revolutionized, grew unstable. We are not concerned here with the many aspects of this mighty social change. Only one point needs emphasis with regard to the thesis of this book. It is the fact that this revolution, working without barricades and guillotine, has created a situation which for a large section of the population was a complete reversal of the old traditional state of affairs.

Conditions of life entirely alien and new were imposed upon millions of men. Yet when the growing dissatisfaction began to crystallize into a political and social counter programme—Communism—we witness the strange spectacle that the defence of Capitalism was based on that very principle which Capitalism itself has imperilled and disregarded: private property. The wrongs inflicted on people were the same everywhere—they were deprived of their social status; but the actual circumstances differed widely. The industrial revolution in England has a gloomier aspect than in Germany. England was about fifty years 'ahead'; the ground was better prepared for a victorious entry of the new dynamic forces. I refer to what has been said about the agricultural problem. Had it not been for Prussia, that powerful dissolvent of tradition, Germany might have remained one of the more conservative countries of Europe. But the ground in Germany was also prepared, only in a different way.

### 4. *The dissolution of the family life.*

This point hardly needs further elucidation. Exposed to insecurity and instability, deprived of property, the proletariat was consequently also deprived of family life in the traditional meaning of the word. Certainly the exaggerations of the Communist Manifesto (Part II) are wrong. That is not an accurate account of what really happened. The student of this period will,

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I think, always be impressed by the tenacity with which the industrial working-class preserved, or at least tried to preserve, the traditional elements of family life, though all the odds were against it. One might even ask whether Capitalism did not affect the *bourgeois* family more. But the fact remains that family life was seriously impaired. The education of the children became an impossible task. We shall deal with this problem, which deserves closer examination, later.

### 5. *The mobilization of new energies.*

All the effects which we have examined so far were negative. Valuable things have been imperilled, shattered and destroyed. We must now turn to the more positive side of this vast affair. Let Karl Marx state the case and defend Capitalism. For the Communists are in full sympathy with the industrial revolution, which they consider inevitable and necessary, according to their Fatalist philosophy. The Communist Manifesto states:

‘The *bourgeoisie* was the first to show us what human activity is capable of achieving. It has executed works more marvellous than the building of the Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts and Gothic cathedrals; it has carried out expeditions surpassing by far the Teutonic invasions and the Crusades.’ And further on: ‘During its reign of scarce a century, the *bourgeoisie* has created more powerful, more stupendous forces of production than all preceding generations rolled into one. The subjugation of the forces of nature, the invention of machinery, the application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steamships, railways, electric telegraphs, the clearing of whole continents for cultivation, the making of navigable waterways, large populations springing up as if by magic out of the earth—what earlier generations had the remotest inkling that such productive powers slumbered within the womb of associated labour?’ With more enthusiasm than I could possibly hope to muster has Marx emphasized the ‘positive’ side of Capitalism: the great increase of productive power and the dynamic energy behind the whole process. The period of Bismarck in Germany, which corresponds to the Victorian age, has produced a set of men, the pioneers of industry, hard-working, tenacious, disciplined, such as other periods cannot claim to have had. It was not primarily wealth that attracted these men, it was power and its secret delights. One misinterprets the spirit of Capitalism if this point is missed.

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If we survey the various effects and aspects of the industrial revolution which have just been outlined, we must come to the conclusion: never before had Europe been exposed to so conspicuous a change. There have been changes of profounder significance starting (as all things in history do) in the minds of men and working secretly for a long time, groping their way, but the industrial revolution was a mighty consummation of many destructive tendencies. The effects were so glaring that nobody could overlook them.

In Germany the unbroken self-confidence of Capitalism did not last longer than two generations. The second generation already was filled with scepticism and doubt; the third capitalist generation (men born at the end of the nineteenth century) had lost the conviction that this system was going to last. A very typical representative of the second generation was Walter Rathenau. He was director of the 'Allgemeine Elektrizitätsgesellschaft', one of the big electricity companies, and had inherited his leading position from his father, the founder of the concern. But he had also ambitions as an author, and wrote books on general topics. This capitalist certainly viewed his time with a heavy heart. After the war he entered politics and was for a short time Minister of Foreign Affairs. He was assassinated in 1922. Thomas Mann's novel, *Die Buddenbrooks*, also shows the rapid loss of vigour in the *bourgeois* society, though the problem of confidence in the capitalist system is not referred to in Mann's book. It is a story of family decline, but it gives the atmosphere and spirit of the period. It is most instructive and revealing as a document of the late nineteenth century.

The gradual loss of self-confidence produced a strange effect. Repentant Capitalism began to seek for remedies. I am not using the word 'repentant' sarcastically. Repentance is the strongest healing force we know and without its aid no evil which men have done can be remedied. The most simple and uneducated man who repents shares, without knowing it, the highest religious and philosophical traditions of our race, for he accepts the mysterious fact of free will. He is a European man loyal to our inheritance and sustained by its force, whereas a refined fatalist, be he even a connoisseur of art and literature and a highly accomplished man, has taken up his position outside the camp of Christendom like the knights of Saladin who fought under the crescent in centuries of the past.

Should the effects of the industrial revolution ever be checked,

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repentance will have to play its part; hatred will achieve nothing. Early Capitalism believed that unrestrained egoism would eventually also serve the common cause. The interests of the individual, his profits and his gains coincide—so people thought—with the public interest, the welfare of society. This philosophy has gone. Nobody nowadays dares to defend it. People who still believe it in their hearts were at least forced to change their jargon. Actual facts have destroyed this Capitalist philosophy and revealed its futility. The present position is that State interference is asked for on an ever-widening scale in order to check the evils which the economic system has produced. The principle of State interference was never vigorously opposed in Germany. This was due to Prussia's influence and enabled the Bismarck Reich to protect the welfare of the working-classes in an effective manner. Nowadays there is no longer any difference between the industrialized countries in this respect; they all had to fall back upon the principle of State interference. But is the State capable of curing the evils which have befallen us? Can deterioration be checked in that way? The nature and the limitations of many modern experiments (including Hitlerism) cannot be fully grasped without answering this question. Let us therefore examine one special case of State interference. I choose the problem of modern education.

There has never been a time when people spent so much thought and energy on education as to-day. To educate, not only just to teach and to instruct, has become a profession which has its experts just like other professions. In former days it was the family that did this work, for it was considered not beyond the capacities of ordinary parents to bring up their children. When Capitalism began to dissolve family life and, for most people, to destroy its economic basis and to limit its scope, the State or the community had to take over the responsibility for education, otherwise there would be grave neglect. State education is expanding everywhere; to compulsory education is added physical training and should there be any other activity of great formative importance (according to the educational experts) State education will, before long, include it. Many people consider this perfectly natural and desirable, at least inevitable.

Parents have learnt to bow to the educational expert, and the growing influence of the State meets with no resistance. Taking a broader view of the problem and one not concerned with the immediate needs of the day, we will come to a different conclusion.

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State education should always be considered an evil, though certainly a lesser one than the evil of neglect. It is a remedy, but it does not restore health. The historical sequence of events teaches us the significance of State education: first, the family is weakened and reduced to such conditions that children can no longer be brought up within its sphere, then the State steps in and takes over the charge of the young. But perhaps one might ask: Why should the State not be able to do the job just as well as the family, even better, more scientifically? The question must be answered, for it refers to a special case of the general problem: can deterioration be cured by accepting the general trend of affairs and by working out some reasonable method of adaptation? There are two main weaknesses of 'organized' national education. One is the intellectual inferiority which is the result of compulsory instruction on a large scale. Knowledge has to be forced on to millions of minds which are quite unsuitable for it and therefore unwilling to accept it. Hence the intensity of the daily struggle which schoolmasters have to fight—the nourishment must be forced down the throat—and hence the atmosphere of intense boredom which damps the vitality of the young. This accounts for the glaring discrepancy between the complicated structure of the whole system and the feebleness of its results. The quality of instruction thus imparted is bound to suffer considerably in the long run. The result is: the young people do not know anything really well. It would be more exact to say, they do not know what knowledge is. It is an illusion to believe that the spirit of modern education is scientific, it is just the opposite—it is authoritative. Opinions have been accepted as true that have not been properly examined, they are accepted because they have been taught persistently. A good deal is forgotten, some remnants stick—such is the intellectual equipment of the average modern man. This explains the dangerous gullibility which propaganda exploits.

The intellectual side of the problem, however, though it is of great importance, concerns us less; the second weakness of State education is more to the point. It is its artificiality. If the family is still intact, reality educates. There are a number of children in a normal family, not one or two. The elder children look after the younger ones. The father's job, be he a peasant or an artisan, provides the natural setting and also real tasks for the young.

Organized education must replace reality through artificial arrangements. The better the system of education endeavours



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to be, the vaster the apparatus which must be set up and sustained. Education becomes a province of its own, detached from life. Great philosophers have believed that this is a path of salvation, that a disintegrating society can be cured by making education a well-built ark which floats on the waters of destruction. With all due respect it must be said that this is an illusion and that the actual experience of history forces us to discard this remedy as ineffective. There is not one single case which could prove the thesis that education has ever saved or restored an imperilled society. Nor can it be otherwise. Education is not creative. It reflects necessarily the realities of the society of which it is nothing but a part. The great changes in human history, whether they were for the better or the worse, have always arisen outside the educational sphere; they were brought about by men who tackled a problem directly. Luther, for example, took a keen interest in education and did not overlook its importance. His 'address to all magistrates of German towns' (1525) proves it. But this interest was not shown until substantial achievements had been secured; Protestantism had to become a reality first before it could be applied to the education of the young. It is, therefore, wrong to attribute a function to education which it cannot perform.

In Germany, Fichte proclaimed the saving power of education in a most dogmatic and vigorous way. Fichte's mind easily yielded to self-intoxication; there is the unpleasant glow of fanaticism in his writings. When he outlined his programme in 1807 the practical effects were negligible. German social conditions had not yet sufficiently deteriorated to make so drastic a cure appear attractive. Fichte's road leads to the void. It was, therefore, a very sound criticism when Immermann compared him with Titus, who entered as a victor the sanctuary of Jerusalem, spear in hand, and found the place empty and bare. The hope of making education the very centre of rejuvenation and reform is futile. But what organized education can do and under certain circumstances ought to do is this: to provide a shelter and a refuge for the young, who would otherwise be exposed to neglect. This function is certainly salutary and important, but we must not misinterpret its significance. State education is a solution imposed by the process of social deterioration. It reveals the fact which underlies all modern developments, that these children, the sons and daughters of the nation, have lost their proper homes. There seems no reason for unmitigated joy.

Let us now examine the actual situation in Germany. Family

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education was firmly established and still unshaken right through the nineteenth century. German autobiographies give a vivid and most attractive picture of the home life which was the true guardian, the sacred memory of so many great men. I mention Arndt, Goethe, Kugelgen, Keller, Carossa, Lietz. There is no better source of information about German life and its atmosphere than these books and their impressive simplicity. There we can also learn what education really is and that it is within the reach of ordinary men and women to bring up their children. Public schools were practically unknown.

The situation changed at the end of the century. The rich felt, quite rightly, that their family life, frequently split up by divorce or embittered by preceding stages, was no longer suitable for the young. The founder of the first German public school was Hermann Lietz, a peasant's son from Rügen. He had been in England and worked as an assistant master under Cecil Reddie in Abbots-holme. Lietz always stressed the point that he was only providing a poor substitute for family education, but that it was necessary to provide something for the steadily growing number of boys who no longer enjoyed the blessings of an unimpaired home. Lietz's idea was that public schools ought to be in the country, centred round a farm, which should be run by the boys. An excellent farmer and gardener himself, he made farming and practical work the main activity of his school.

The English public school has a very different basis. It provided the education for a ruling class with strong and definite traditions. These schools, whose special problems do not concern us here, had certainly not the background of shattered homes and dissolving family life, which Lietz visualized as the grave social defect demanding a remedy.

The success of this remarkable man was astonishing. In 1898 he started, penniless, his first school on a farm in the Harz mountain. Fifteen years later he was the headmaster of three well-known schools and one orphanage. The example of Lietz was followed: public schools sprang up everywhere, many of them on very different lines. They were urban and intellectual in character. Lietz died in 1919. I think he has only found one successor, Kurt Hahn, the headmaster of Salem School near Lake Constance. These two men, very different in outlook and character, equal in power of vision, never met. Hahn, too, was influenced by English education, he studied in Oxford. After the Nazis had come into power Hahn went to England and

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founded Gordonstoun School. The Nazis have adopted the public-school principle; they have, of course, abandoned Lietz's guiding idea. They deny (like the Communists) the right of the parents to educate their children. The reversal of German education was sudden and, I think, complete. The whole youth of Germany is now educated by the State. Hitler Youth and Labour camps provide the necessary organization.

The deterioration of society and tradition has reached such a stage that immediate action has to be taken in many cases. Even an incomplete cure is better than neglect. But we must try to view the problem which confronts us as a whole, we must understand its full magnitude. Only then can we hope to find a solution, a line of action adequate to the gravity of the evil. I think we are far from it. What hampers our efforts is confusion of thought. We are so entangled in terms and ideas which no longer clarify the present situation that it has become extremely difficult to grasp the issue in its full complexity.

Is it not astonishing that Conservative parties should have thought it their duty to defend the Capitalist system, which was the most revolutionary force that has ever entered the life of European men? High time indeed to discard terms which have become senseless or utterly misleading! It seems certain that future generations will find it difficult to grasp the confusion of political thought which prevailed among the masses of our modern democracies. Lutherans and Papists—that is a clear cleavage. Royalists and Puritans—that is clear too. But 'right' and 'left'? Future critics may ask: how was it possible that these two terms, which are—as words—quite meaningless and which produced in the average mind only very vague and rather arbitrary associations, could have served as battle-cries? The answer can only be: such is the 'modern mind'. Rousseau's profound thesis that democracies can only exist if no political parties be permitted; his warning that 'each citizen should only think his own thoughts', all this seems to have been forgotten; for democracies certainly developed on very different lines. Political information, of such accuracy as a practical man would insist upon if he must decide a practical question, was neither given nor demanded and the citizen, instead of trying to think his own thoughts, allowed himself to be satisfied with the vaguest generalizations, formulated by others. The real problems of our time cannot even be stated, let alone solved, if we do not abandon the old patterns of political thought. The term 'conservative' is a clear and dignified word,

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for it befits man to preserve. But he must know what he wants to preserve. Examining his position, he may find that he would rather like some things back which have been taken away from him. Let this honest man not be unduly impressed and dismayed if somebody comes along and shouts: 'You are a reactionary.' Words should frighten nobody. It is necessary to-day to break the hypnotic spell which is upon many minds, that it is disgraceful and impossible to go back if you find that you are on the wrong road.

High tribute should be paid to the great Englishman who started his political career as a Tory and ended as a Radical but always remained a true Conservative—William Cobbett—a man who not only tried to preserve but wanted old things to come back. His weaknesses are well known and have been sufficiently stressed; nor has his importance been overlooked. In his impulsive and erratic way he followed, nevertheless, a perfectly clear and consistent line of thought and action. He felt with all his instincts that a deadly danger was imminent, threatening the happiness of Englishmen and the security of their homes. He knew that the pomp of power and the steaming furnaces of industry are by no means signs of a nation's inner strength and that it is rural life which is the great health-giving centre of a stable society. I should like to conclude this chapter with the words which G. K. Chesterton, another gallant defender of the countryside, wrote on Cobbett, the rural rider:

'When I used to go out as a boy into the green twilight, having written nonsense all night (fortunately unpublished) and drink coffee at a stall in the street, brooding upon all these things, it seemed then as if the tide were running high enough in the one direction; but I have since had a notion that high tides can turn. The enormous buildings, seen in outline like uncouth drawings, seem to stand up more insecurely against an altered sky; with some change in it too subtle yet to be called the twilight. I discovered, at least, that even in all that labyrinth of the new London by night there is an unvisited hour of almost utter stillness, before the creaking carts begin to come in from the market-gardens, to remind us that there is still somewhere a countryside. And in that stillness I have sometimes fancied I heard, tiny and infinitely far away, something like a faint voice hallooing and the sound of horse-hoofs that return.'

## VI

### THE BISMARCK REICH 1871-1918

IN August 1806 Francis II abdicated as Holy Roman Emperor. He considered this step to be necessary and reasonable after Napoleon had assumed the Protectorate over various German principalities joined together in the confederation of the Rhine (July 1806). The Archduke Francis Ferdinand, who was murdered in Sarajevo in 1914, once remarked that the abdication of Francis was a serious mistake. There is much truth in this. The situation in 1815, after Napoleon's downfall, would have been very different and the restoration of the Empire under Austria's leadership an easier task had the Austrian claims never been renounced. As it was, the tension between the victorious allies, the conflicting ideas and interests, grew so strong after the common danger had been overcome, that the hopes of the German patriots, the restoration of the Empire, could not be fulfilled. Stein struggled in vain. He worked out one scheme and plan after the other in rapid succession, in order to meet the ever-increasing diplomatic difficulties. He failed. A compromise arrangement was the outcome of all these struggles and intrigues; the German Confederation. Its originators, particularly Metternich, had planned it as a thing that should not really work. It was therefore, in many ways, a fraud. People felt that they had been deceived by their Governments, they were not only disappointed—there was bitter resentment. The patriots who had brought about Prussia's resurrection went into opposition, their services were no longer needed. Stein took no further part in political life. The active political opposition lacked competent leadership, it degenerated into a turbulent movement among young people, mostly students; it was full of enthusiasm, but in many ways farcical. Sheltered behind the policy of reaction, which Metternich inaugurated, the Prussian State regained its old peculiar nature—the idea of Stein was abandoned—Prussia no longer bowed to Germany. It is certainly true that Austria bears a good deal of responsibility for this harmful reversal. In 1815 the forces that had stood behind Stein's reforms were ready and at hand. They would have been at Austria's disposal had she dared to rally them. But she did the opposite—she dispersed them. It was Metternich who unintentionally paved the way for Bismarck, because he did not dare to reap the harvest of the war of liberation. He did not want to,

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he considered it dangerous and undesirable. Metternich regarded modern nationalism as a disruptive force that ought to be checked and suppressed at all cost. He traced it back to the French Revolution. We are not concerned with the wider aspects of his policy. There was a good deal of wisdom and insight behind it but also much fear and stupidity. Such mixtures exist. Compared with the English reaction after Waterloo, Metternich was in a rather strong and favourable position: he really tried to defend the pre-revolutionary state of affairs; in England, however, there was a pseudo-reaction which, through its immobility, gave an undeserved protection to the revolutionary forces of early capitalism. It is generally agreed that Metternich's policy failed; the forces which he tried to suppress managed to survive. The point which I want to stress here is that Metternich achieved what he certainly did not want to—he restored Prussia.

The German Confederation did not work, because it lacked power. We have witnessed in our time the breakdown of the League of Nations, which suffered from the same intrinsic weakness. Such superstructures remain futile and cannot cope effectively with any political problem so long as they have no force at their disposal. The political realities in Germany were Austria and Prussia, outweighing all other German principalities. The Confederation was a mere shadow; it became the arena where Austro-Prussian antagonism could fully display itself and grow into dangerous tension. That is what happened. The old rivalry, dating back to Frederick the Great, came to life again, and with it the conflict of patriotic loyalties. (See Chapter III.) The struggle was fought by means of diplomacy and political pressure and intrigue for over fifty years until such an amount of irritation, grievances and undecided issues had accumulated that Bismarck came to the bold conclusion that the conflict would have to be decided by force. He did not come to this conclusion because force was the only method he believed in, as is sometimes maintained. Bismarck handled power with great sagacity like a man dealing with high explosives, fully aware of their dangerous nature. He also knew the decisive importance of what he called the imponderable elements in politics—mental attitudes, convictions, emotions, prejudices; all these things he carefully estimated. More than that—he would have approved of Talleyrand's words to Napoleon in 1814: 'Sire, bayonets are useful in many ways, but you cannot sit on them.' Bismarck's foreign policy after 1871 will not be understood unless we grasp its leading

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idea, which was to win the confidence of Europe. The Prussian Army alone, he knew that well, could not guarantee the safety of the new Reich. To come back to our problem: About the middle of the nineteenth century the Austro-Prussian tension had become a political factor of great force and moment. When Bismarck, in 1851, went to Frankfurt (which was the seat of the German Confederation) as Prussia's ambassador, he firmly believed in a peaceful solution. He considered co-operation between the two great German powers necessary. In Frankfurt he changed his opinion. Bismarck's patriotism, contrary to Stein's, was decidedly Prussian. Democracy, and all it stood for, he considered Prussia's real enemy. The implications of this are clear (see Chapter IV). On the 3rd of December 1850 he declared in the Prussian 'Landtag': 'Prussia's honour demands that she avoids the ignominious alliance with democracy.' In Frankfurt he came to the conviction that there was another enemy threatening Prussia's independence—Austria. Fifteen years elapsed before this war against Austria came off, many stages had to be passed, many obstacles had to be removed, and when the war eventually came it was entirely Bismarck's war. He dragged a hesitating and unwilling King into it, the Army disapproved of it, public opinion condemned it. No other German state joined Prussia. Had the young fanatic who tried to murder Bismarck on the 7th of May 1866 succeeded—only Bismarck's personal courage prevented it—there would, presumably, never have been an Austro-Prussian war. Bismarck struggled with his assailant, forcing the hand which held the pistol—several shots had missed—thus saving his own life. On the 3rd of July the Battle of Sadowa was won.

The antagonism between Prussia and Austria, the conflict which Bismarck brought to an end by war, should never have arisen again after 1813. Nor would it, had Stein and his friends won through. It was from the German point of view a political pseudo-problem. But we have seen that it was not only Prussia who is to be blamed for this. The effects and consequences of Sadowa were remarkable and amazing. Bismarck's success silenced his opposition. The war became popular because it had led to victory. We can well understand it if accomplished facts are reluctantly accepted as such, for this has happened again and again in history. But the reaction of public opinion in Prussia signified more. An intrinsic weakness of morale was revealed, an incapacity to believe in defeated causes. I consider this to be one of the inevitable effects of militarism. Chivalry, which is the highest

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soldierly virtue, but a virtue not confined to soldiers, can hardly be expected to flourish in a community where military strength is considered the highest value. If St. George had been defeated he would not have been turned into a worshipper of the dragon, for chivalry makes a man stand defeat without deserting his cause. In Prussia, however, people behaved differently. Bismarck, who had been the most hated man before the outbreak of war, became, after the victory, perhaps not the best-loved but certainly the most respected. The Prussian parliament hastily granted indemnity for the breach of constitution which Bismarck had committed. For since 1862—the period of conflict—Bismarck had rearmed against the will of the Chamber. His sins were now forgiven! A majority of 273 votes against 14 sanctioned the ruthless annexation of Hanover, Hesse, Cassel, Nassau, the Danish Duchies, and Frankfurt. The Prussian Army was also reconciled. The appetite came with the eating. There was even a severe crisis when Bismarck insisted upon lenient peace terms for Austria. King William, converted by the success of Sadowa, would have liked to push on. The account which Bismarck himself gave in his memoirs has been proved to be rather fictitious and melodramatic, but the gist of it is true—the misgivings of the officers had vanished; this war was now theirs.

There remained, however, centres of opposition and resistance. All of them drew the strength of their conviction from non-Prussian sources. There was the Hanoverian party, irreconcilable and hostile to the Prussian régime. The injustice of 1866 was not forgotten, it was a living memory which did not grow faint, although Prussia went from success to success. In 1913 Emperor William II tried to bring about the reconciliation between the House of Hohenzollern and the House of Cumberland by marrying his daughter to Prince Ernst August, the grandson of the last King of Hanover. The Prince was made Duke of Brunswick. But Hanoverian particularism survived even the Great War. It was not only in Hanover that German particularism remained a living force after the Bismarck unification. This spirit and mentality had to be reckoned with and Bismarck was prepared to make concessions as far as South Germany was concerned. Particularism is still alive to-day, though it is officially denounced as something inferior. Schoolboys in Germany are taught that the small German States of the past did nothing but quarrel, which is of course emphatically untrue, and that only centralization makes for power, which is true but not a blessing in itself. The fallacy



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became popular that the bigger a thing the better. That such a test should be accepted is a sign of vulgarization.

Another centre of opposition was the Catholics. Their sympathies were on the Austrian side. Prussian partisans interpreted the success of Bismarck as a victory of Protestantism, an unjustified claim, but it widened the gulf considerably. The question whether Prussia has some real connection with Protestantism has been examined in Chapter III. The Catholic opposition remained unshaken, even after 1871. It found a remarkable leader in Windthorst, and the Catholic Church triumphed over Bismarck when he had to break off his 'Kulturkampf' in 1887. But the tide was very much against Catholicism, which was looked upon as an anachronism out of touch with the realities of the day. Many Catholics yielded to this self-assertive progressive spirit and developed what psychologists call an inferiority complex. Catholic writers have talked about the 'Ghetto' into which their religion had been banned by the anti-Catholic tendencies of the age. The varying parliamentary opposition which Bismarck had to cope with cannot be dealt with in this book.

The crucial problem that confronted Bismarck after 1866 was the attitude of South Germany. Would it be possible to overcome the marked anti-Prussian feelings and suspicions and to incorporate the States 'south of the line of the Main' into the Prussian system? Not only was South Germany herself very unwilling, but Austria and still more France were most anxious to prevent any further expansion of Prussia's power. The obstacles that lay in the way of Bismarck's policy seemed to be formidable. They were overcome through diplomatic skill and ingenuity. Bismarck's idea was to rally the hesitating German nation behind Prussia by creating a situation where there seemed to be a French menace directed against the whole of Germany. 'The French war was necessary,' he said in later years, 'for without having beaten France we could never have established the German Reich.' It has been concluded that a French menace did not exist, that Bismarck put up this phantom in order to achieve his aim—German unity. This is not quite true. When Napoleon III signed the order for mobilization in 1870, whilst heavy tears were running down his cheeks, he had been caught in his own net. His will to interfere in German affairs had been genuine since 1866, but Bismarck duped him. The Austro-French negotiations after Sadowa, attempting a military alliance, had not reached a final settlement when the crisis came. We may compare the situation

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with Prussia's position in 1756. Only this time the Austro-French coalition did *not* work—Austria remained neutral. Whilst it is impossible to depict the duped Emperor of France as an innocent victim of aggression, it cannot be denied that the actual war of 1870 was brought off by Bismarck. We need not discuss here the details of the Hohenzollern candidature to the Spanish throne; the whole problem is still highly controversial. For our purposes it is enough to say that Bismarck welcomed the opportunity of going to war against France, for this was the only way he could hope to rally South Germany. The memories of 1813 were exploited. In 1813 a war of liberation had to be fought, foreign rule was to be broken; in 1870 an unstable French Government, unready for war, had to be labelled as a great national danger. There was an element of deceit in this policy and an element of insincerity in the frantic patriotism which responded to it. I shall deal with the dubious character of this patriotism further on. It is, after all, the mentality that brought about the new Reich. First I want to conclude the survey of events.

Prussia's victory in the field led to the foundation of the new Reich. This again was entirely Bismarck's personal work. He staged the whole thing. The main personages of the play were his puppets, some of them difficult to handle, others extremely manageable. The most important tool that Bismarck used, was the King of Bavaria, Louis II, unbalanced and highly suggestible. A few years later his madness became apparent. We need not discuss in detail the conflicting ideas and interests which Bismarck had to force into co-operation. It was an exhausting task and he was sometimes near despair. Nor did the result of all his labours find general approval. Emperor William I, proud of being King of Prussia, accepted his new title with great reluctance and sulked, the Crown Prince called the Constitution of the Reich 'an elaborate chaos', and Lasker, a deputy of the Reichstag, expressed the feelings of many when he said (referring to the Reich): 'The girl is extremely ugly, but she must be married.' Such were the circumstances under which Prussia's rule over Germany was secured.

The establishment of the Bismarck Reich may well be called the conquest of Germany. The whole event had the character of a campaign which began in 1866 and ended five years later in 1871. The gist of the story is the skilful use of Prussia's military power. When Bismarck became Prime Minister, Prussia had already shaken off the German fetters which Stein and, later on, the

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revolution of 1848 had tried to impose upon her. The Austro-Prussian rivalry, that political pseudo-problem, became the pivot of his policy and he settled the question in 1866. The victory of Sadowa and the annexations which followed firmly established Prussia north of the Main. Bismarck then managed to silence the anti-Prussian opposition in South Germany by engineering the war against France and by rousing a national enthusiasm that removed the obstacles that were still in his way. It is impossible to deny Bismarck's capacities. He is the greatest statesman whom Prussia ever produced and in many ways an attractive personality, but the effects of his triumphant success on Germany were harmful. These effects we must now examine.

Crown Prince Frederick once wrote in his diary that Bismarck's policy had given Germany power but deprived her of her good conscience. The corrupting effect of the Reich is clearly stated in this sentence. What was the nature of this corruption? We must discriminate between two forces which practically at the same time began to work upon Germany and her traditional way of life; one was Prussia and the other the industrial revolution. Both were dissolvents of tradition, but they had originally nothing to do with each other. Their effects happened to coincide and there were special reasons which drew them together. They shared a secret; the drug of power. This, I think, was of great importance and consequence. One might answer that both systems, Prussianism and Capitalism, confer power only on very few, that the recruit on the parade ground and the worker in the factory are hardly exposed to the evil effects of this drug. But in some ways they are. They certainly do not taste the real delights of power but they have to yield to the overwhelming pressure of the system. The feeling of insignificance which they experience is some kind of compliment paid to the power which rules their lives. Is there anything else which counts? Such is the reaction of these victims.

Prussia and Capitalism have the tendency to blot out everything else, not because of any intrinsic superior value but because of their dynamic energy which takes man's breath away. It is not necessary to repeat what has been said about the destructive and deadening effect both of Prussia and Capitalism. Our task is now to explain their co-operation.

Prussia had always been an agricultural state. She was originally a poor country and her poverty was part of her pride and strength. Emperor William I was a true representative of this old Spartan tradition and kept to it amidst the growing wealth of his

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capital. Nor was he the last Prussian who showed this noble contempt of luxury—Hindenburg belonged to the same type. But as time went on such men grew rare. Emperor William II made friends with bankers and industrialists. His Court was certainly no longer Spartan, the flavour of wealth began to permeate Prussian society; the effect was vulgarization. It must be admitted that this development met with opposition from more conservative quarters. There were Prussians who considered the Kaiser an apostate, who was yielding dangerously to forces and influences incompatible with the traditions of Prussia. They were right, but their opposition was ineffective and their own positive point of view often crude and provincial. The general trend of affairs remained unaltered: Prussian militarism and industrial expansion interfused. This gave the Reich its character. The amalgamation was a practical necessity. The two forces needed each other. There was the practical problem of armament. Prussia was not machine-minded to start with. She, of course, gave way to the general impulse of scientific development and did not fail to modernize her army, but the technical opportunities were not eagerly seized before the Great War. The Kaiser's army busied itself with many things that had little to do with modern warfare. The outlook of the military experts was rather conservative, they were not keen on innovations. The Emperor's taste was theatrical, he liked above all the glitter of parade. William II, at the head of his cuirassiers, armed like Lohengrin, riding over the Tempelhof field in the sunshine of 'Hohenzollern weather'—that surely was not a very modern display, it was more like a Wagner opera. Modern science and its military importance were certainly not neglected, but it was not until after the Great War that the real change took place. The reduction of the army imposed by the Treaty of Versailles made it possible to transform the small military body, the 'Reichswehr', into a highly modern instrument of war. It was a change of mind and attitude, that led to a great improvement of military training. The actual arms (which were at first forbidden) came later. Post-war Prussia was certainly machine-minded. The war has proved it. But already in the Bismarck era was the fact well appreciated that a modern army needs powerful industry. A purely agricultural society cannot defend itself in modern times.

Industry, on the other hand, profited greatly from the military and political power which was now at the disposal of the German Reich. Industrial expansion, the conquest and infiltration of

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foreign markets, is closely linked up with the power of the State which stands behind such exploits and is prepared to back them. Bismarck, it is true, showed some reluctance. Having achieved his main purpose, the unification of Germany under the rule of Prussia, he was anxious to avoid further friction with other great powers. He repeated again and again that Germany was now 'saturated', he opposed the idea of building a German Navy, he disappointed the champions of colonial expansion, e.g. Carl Peters, for he was not prepared to give the assistance of the Reich to any project that might lead to conflict with the older Colonial powers. Bismarck himself was a farmer. On some of the photographs taken in his later years after his dismissal he looks like an old peasant who never left the countryside, a rural autocrat who would stand no nonsense. Looking at these impressive pictures one might think that politics, after all, were only a side line of this remarkable man, that it was not the prospering capital of the Reich but his own estate where Bismarck felt at home. The one thing he never forgave his successor, Caprivi, was that he ordered some old trees in the garden of the chancellery to be cut down. He certainly did not himself represent the new economic powers of the era which bears his name. But the caution and reluctance of the experienced statesman could hardly alter the situation—German industrialism was pushing ahead, and under William II it found the protection and the encouragement which Bismarck had failed to give. The commercial imperialism which the Kaiser favoured stands certainly in marked contrast to Bismarck's foreign policy, but it is nevertheless a true product of the soil which Bismarck had prepared. The differences of opinion which existed between William II and his Chancellor do not concern us here.

The new Reich, dominated by forces which had no roots in the ancient traditions of Germany, produced some kind of patriotism which was a novelty in spite of its traditional terms and elements. This new patriotism is highly significant and deserves full attention. What strikes us first is the fluency of its verbiage. This alone should rouse suspicion. For the root of man's patriotism is the love of his home, of his father's house, of his native country. Such love tends to be mute or rather inarticulate; only the loss of the precious possession or acute danger threatening it will urge patriotism on to express itself in words. So will gratitude, overpowering a man who comes back to his native shore like Odysseus. Patriotism in this its original sense has always been considered an

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indispensable virtue of the citizen. No society can exist without it. Even a great man like Tolstoy tries in vain to eradicate so noble and ancient a feeling, his invectives are feeble and will never convince normal men, only cranks. One might even doubt if he managed to convince himself, for he wept when he received the news of Russia's defeat in the war against Japan. Modern industrialized societies, however, find themselves in a very difficult position. The fluctuation of the urban populace affects the realities which underlie and nourish patriotism. In 1899 Hamburg had 700,000 inhabitants; 212,700 of them changed their domicile during that year, 108,200 moved into the town, 86,000 left. This is not an exceptional state of affairs; other German towns give approximately the same picture. Under such conditions the old term, 'home', lost its meaning for many. The traditional associations lingered on, but the reality went. There can be no natural growth of patriotism without a fair amount of stability. We must add to this, the general dissolution of traditional standards which the nineteenth century brought about, the unsettling effect of the industrial revolution, the radical transformation of wide districts. What was the effect? Patriotism became a mass emotion, detached from the realities which had been its source. The change, of course, was a gradual one, but it cannot be denied. It is an interesting study to compare German patriotism of 1813 and of 1870. The poetry of Körner and Arndt is not of a very high order, but it is genuine and sincere. Schenkendorf is more subtle; Eichendorff is a great poet. The outbursts of Kleist, though sometimes ferocious, never lack the dark impressive majesty of all his creations. This was not stage thunder. The patriotic poetry of 1870 rings untrue. Take Geibel's poem:

Es zog von Westen  
der Unhold aus  
sein Reich zu festen  
in Blut und Graus —  
Furchtbar dräut uns der Erbfeind!

(The monster is coming from the west to secure his empire in blood and horror—the arch-enemy threatens us mightily!)

This refers to Napoleon III. Surely, the poet cannot have believed it himself. He had to work himself up, faking the emotions of 1813. His patriotism is manufactured. There are other instances. Arndt is certainly a fierce nationalist. His hatred of France is unpleasant. But in all his writings the emphasis lies

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upon self-criticism. He blames the Germans, he warns them. This, I think, is only natural. For the primary function of the patriot is to warn and to reprimand, not to shower compliments upon his own nation and to indulge in self-exaltation. The patriotism of the new Reich boasted. It became noisy, self-assertive and hollow. Bismarck himself was too great a man to be the promoter of this new nationalism. His loyalties were deeply rooted, they were primarily dynastic and Prussian. He was also a sincere warner of his country, particularly after his dismissal. But even Bismarck adapted himself. In his speeches he is always at his best when he fights. His presence of mind, his pugnacity, were outstanding. But he liked to end with a patriotic flourish intended for home consumption. Some of these phrases became very popular, e.g. 'We Germans fear nothing in the world except God!' Such words are like a cue on the stage—applause has to follow and is expected. Things grew worse under William II. The self-glorification of patriotism began to disgust sincere men. People talked about 'Hurrah patriotism'. But the technique of stirring up and fostering this kind of mass emotion steadily improved. The Nazis, utterly uprooted themselves, brought it to perfection. The patriotism of the Bismarck Reich is a clear and unmistakable symptom of national deterioration; it is not at all surprising: something like that had to be expected.

The infiltration of Prussianism after 1871 was, of course, a gradual process. Its main instrument was conscription. Bavaria and Württemberg and other German states had kept their own armies or regiments under the supreme command of the Emperor, but this made little practical difference. The system was the same everywhere. It is self-evident that the two years' service which the average German had to undergo was a formative experience and affected the whole outlook of the nation. Prussia began to educate the millions of Germans who had come under her rule. Conscription, on the whole, was not unpopular. This might astonish, considering the many irritations, sometimes even humiliations to which men were exposed. Cases of real maltreatment were rare. August Bebel, the leader of the Socialists, made it his special task to bring them up in Parliament. Conscription was borne patiently and the old psychological trick worked, which secures so many rather unpleasant things in human life. People said: it has done me no harm, let others go through it too. This was very often the attitude of soldiers serving their second or third year, they were the strong supporters of the system,

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not because they really approved of it but because they had gone through it themselves. The army training became a very important factor in German life. It was one of the strongest national traditions which had lasted unshakeable for generations at a time when everything else seemed to change.

After the Great War I heard a well-known German business man remark: 'We Germans have only got one tradition left—the army.' What an admission! If this were true we might well say: *Finis Germaniae*; and the political programme which all other nations would have to pursue in their own interest would be the complete and permanent disarmament of Germany linked up with all the safeguards that could possibly be devised. But it is not true. Prussia, Bismarck, the industrial revolution, the turmoil of the post-war period, the frenzy of Hitlerism—none of these forces have destroyed the substance of German life. This cannot be proved scientifically. But we must admit that it is most unlikely, generally speaking, that a process of decline which started in the eighteenth century and became fully effective not until the late nineteenth century, should have dissolved a tradition that took a thousand years to grow. Too solid, indeed, is the texture of our common civilization to be torn to pieces as easily as that!

It must also be realized that all these changes which Germany underwent met with opposition. By way of illustration, I mention first the strange German Youth Movement which sprang up at the end of the nineteenth century, starting in Berlin amongst the boys of a day school at Steglitz, a suburb of the capital. This movement was spontaneous; grown-ups were excluded and had originally nothing to do with it; there was no organization, nor even a definite purpose, yet the thing grew. The impulse at work was: boys ran away from their parents and masters. They were groping after some kind of life quite different from what the *bourgeois* society could provide. They roamed about the countryside, rediscovering Germany for themselves, they spent the nights in the open air or in barns, they stayed with the peasants, they despised the metropolitan amusements. Old traditions in folklore and music were revived; this youth chose their own favourite poets and one cannot deny that their instinct advised them well. Hölderlin was read with enthusiasm. His poetry stood certainly in marked contrast to the leading tendencies of the time. Langbehn, the author of *Der Rembrandt-Deutsche*, once gave Hölderlin's *Hyperion* to Bismarck's wife, and she remarked later: 'We got a good laugh out of it!' The youth movement indicated that



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family life was losing its formative influence and that State and Society did not attract and satisfy the younger generation—they tried to break way. They tried, but they did not succeed. The task which they set themselves was too heavy. The movement lost its original revolutionary push; self-complacency spread, an unpleasant and unsavoury cult of Youth was indulged in, a type of young man developed who was afraid of growing up. This stage was already reached before the Great War. The movement went on, numbers grew, it became a widespread organization; the original purpose, however, had been abandoned. D. H. Lawrence has written an essay on the German *Wandervögel* in Italy, they strike him as extremely odd—they certainly were—but he feels the impulse behind them. They were not just hikers.

Another force of opposition, more formidable and more mature, arose from the Catholic side. In the years before the Great War Catholicism began to emerge from the 'ghetto' into which it had been exiled. It became noticeable that the Catholics were no longer on the defensive. In the second half of the nineteenth century they underwent the ordeal of general polite contempt, now they were beginning to harass their enemies and soon turned out to be a striking force equal to their opponents and often superior. It was only a small group of writers; their numbers however, grew. Theodor Haecker, who has already been mentioned in this book, is very representative for this Catholic *élite*. Haecker is a convert; he translated Kierkegaard and Newman and has written about half a dozen small books, all of which have a very high level.

Haecker's views are neither startling nor original, their force is exactly this lack of originality—he arrays the power of tradition. The calm confidence and humility which finds expression in Haecker's books is much more in keeping with Germany's nature than Nietzsche's frenzy or Spengler's pomposity. But he is also a fighter. His attacks on Stefan George and Spengler prove it. He pushed these two poseurs from their pedestals. I quote a passage from his book on Virgil, which shows the detachment and also the realism of his outlook.

'There are people who think it impossible, even nonsensical, to maintain that Man keeps the identity of his nature whether he goes by train and by air and has a wireless set or whether he is a fisherman or a hunter or a peasant and rides or walks on foot, whether he no longer believes in God or still believes in him or believes again. But the truth is—even these improbable men who

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have such strange opinions are nevertheless men themselves, that type has always existed even before there was a radio! Again: a boy of 19 who leaves school is to-day more than ever before a prey of the time—and what a time! A time that makes suicidal efforts in trying to kill the Eternal, without which no time and no period have ever been able to exist.'

Another Catholic author of rank is Romano Guardini. I mention his thoughtful book on Dostoevsky (*Man and his Belief*). Guardini tried to give some guidance to the younger generation which after the Great War came under Dostoevsky's spell (see Chapter VIII). The influence of this Catholic literature was limited. Germans outside the Catholic Church did not sufficiently realize that the voice of ancient Germany could be heard in these books.

The task which I set myself in this chapter is nearly completed. We have examined Bismarck's policy, its aims and achievements. We have discussed the character of the Reich, the new patriotism, the co-operation of Prussia and industry. It seems advisable now to point out the difference between the English and German development in its corresponding stages. The general outline of events will come out more clearly.

The changes which took place in both countries at the same time are, broadly speaking, very similar. Their main character can be summed up in one word—urbanization. This process was even more vehement and energetic in England than in Germany. The far-reaching consequences can therefore be observed in either country.

The initial stages of industrialism and the new social conditions were more sordid in England. Germany was spared the ghastly state of affairs which is revealed in J. L. Hammond's book *The Town Labourer*. But although the revolutionary forces of Capitalism found a wider scope in England, the traditional standards were less challenged and defied than in Germany. English conservatism proved to be a stronger force than anything Germany seemed to have at her disposal to meet the disintegrating influence of the industrial age. This conservatism is in many ways an enigma for the nations on the Continent. They find it hard to understand a mind ready to leave an important issue in the balance, not deciding one way or the other, yet accepting this state of indecision and suspense as a perfectly happy solution. That two conflicting ideas should not be pursued until they openly clash, that it should be possible to accept both, a

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compromise being found or tacitly taken for granted—this English attitude and practice is often admired by Germans as the clear manifestation of 'world-wise' shrewdness, very appropriate for men of affairs, but it is not regarded as a token of sincerity; it is believed to be a mask. Schopenhauer called Dr. Johnson's Anglican faith despicable. He took it for granted that an educated man in modern times must have abandoned all belief in Christian dogmas and should therefore openly defy the Church and her obsolete activities. Nothing could be more un-English than Nietzsche's philosophy; such radicalism is suspect on this side of the Channel. England has never shown great readiness to throw old things overboard as useless ballast; a sound distrust of sweeping innovations and radical verdicts prevails. In the sixteenth century the Erasmian reformation which tried to blend and interfuse old and new ideas in order to avoid breach and disruption found its best response in England. The Erasmian attempt failed but when the great Humanist died in 1536 he was a forgotten and vanquished man on the Continent overshadowed and pushed aside by the impetus and violence of Luther, his followers and adversaries as well. In England, however, Erasmus' ideal was still widely adhered to though all the odds were against it. There is therefore an important difference between the English and the German situation—industrialisation was more vehement and thorough in England but there was less disintegration of the traditional national life because the conservative temperament which holds on to old standards and values in a stubborn and irrational manner was much stronger than in Germany.

Both nations developed some kind of industrial imperialism, arising from the same economic and social conditions. In England it was a more natural growth (if such a term be permitted in that connexion): her political position after Waterloo gave her a favourable chance. In Germany it was a sudden and rather impetuous development. The potent element which made the German situation unique was Prussia and her triumph. We must reject the fatalist interpretation of history—Prussia's success was not inevitable. Her advance was slow and there were many setbacks and critical moments when everything might have taken a different turn. I shall conclude this chapter by showing in what way German urbanization was influenced in its character and spirit through the triumph of Prussia which happened to coincide with this general development. The growing towns, the advance of

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science, the triumphs of medicine, the inventions of technique, all these many and rapid changes made people believe that the more static conditions of the past were going to be happily dissolved into a dynamic process of uninterrupted change leading mankind on from good to better. The idea of progress seized men's minds—it was a guiding idea, a powerful stimulus, a stirring hope. It became the popular philosophy of life, some kind of creed. The *élite* of the nation, however, took a different view. Men like Nietzsche and Jakob Burckhardt maintained that modern society was rapidly dissolving. At the same time, when the idea of progress began to sway the masses, a very pessimistic analysis of the general situation was worked out by individuals. This philosophy, which will be discussed in the last chapter of this book, reached full maturity at the end of the nineteenth century, though its final and most effective stages were still to come. It has been said that the idea of progress lacked a goal, that it was progress for progress' sake and therefore from the purely logical point of view nonsensical. This, I think, is not true. The idea was not nonsensical, but it was primitive and still is. If we study the progressive mood or temperament we shall have to admit that the goal of the journey is more or less taken for granted and therefore less stressed. What else could it be except greater happiness, higher standards of living, more commodities, more knowledge? In short—more of all good things. There was no change of outlook behind this new creed, no reversal of old values, it was nothing more than the naïve confidence that the rapid changes, some of them undoubtedly improvements, would bring about a better state of affairs in general. The test of progress was not so much the steady approach to the goal but the growing distance which separated present conditions from the past. This test was certainly very primitive. People derived great pleasure from the observation that machines rapidly improved and that they could do things which were undreamed of a short time before, e.g., go by train or ride a bicycle. Thus the past was discredited and the present was just the gateway to an even more progressive future. Similar effects could be noticed in the past in connexion with scientific advance, only on a much smaller scale. Civilized men, of course, never shared such crude convictions, but their voices were drowned for the time being amidst the rejoicings of the progressive. The idea of progress can be called the self-defence of the industrial revolution. This spirit was therefore at work in all countries and found expression in journalism and popular

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literature. The past grew faint and unconvincing, it became identical with the old-fashioned or obsolete. Men who lived in the new machine-made world of the industrial revolution, exposed to its uprooting influence, were made to believe that the present conditions were certainly superior to the past; the cocksureness of this false conviction, greatly shaken since, was the really dangerous factor. I shall give an example and quote the opinions of the two German Socialists, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, on rural life and pre-industrial mentality. Engels, writing about the condition of the working-class in England on the eve of the industrial revolution gives this picture:

‘The English artisans and craftsmen lived and had their being in retirement, in a seclusion which may still be found in certain parts of Germany, without intellectual activity and without violent perturbations in their way of life. They went regularly to Church, never talked politics, never conspired together, never gave time to thought, delighted in bodily revels and games and listened to readings from the Bible with traditional piety. But from an intellectual point of view they were dead, living solely for their own petty interests, for their looms and their tiny gardens. . . . They felt at ease in their tranquilly vegetative existence. Had it not been for the industrial revolution they would never have broken away from a life that was unworthy of human beings, despite its glamour of romance. In truth, they were not human beings, but merely machines that worked in the service of the small group of nobles who had hitherto been the substance of history.’

The lack of judgement revealed in this passage is indeed amazing. We may well compare Engels with the Kafir who is ready to give away gold and ivory in exchange for an ugly alarm-clock which he then hangs round his neck. Nor is Marx wiser. He praises the *bourgeoisie* for having created ‘huge cities . . . vastly increasing the urban population as compared with the rural, and thus removing a large proportion of the inhabitants from the seclusion and ignorance of rural life’. Marx and Engels did not hesitate to give their crushing verdicts on ways of life and standards entirely outside the narrow limits of their own experience. This cocksureness helped to discredit the values of the past, narrowed down the range of experience and intensified wherever this spirit spread the uprooting influence of the industrial revolution.

The urban progressive optimism, with its vision of future happiness, was never a dominating force in Germany, certainly

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not in the Bismarck period. The spirit was there, but it was inter-fused with other peculiarly German elements, which altered its character. The special note of the new German mentality which gave the Reich its character was triumphant defiance. It was like a man rubbing his hands after he has achieved a series of unexpected successes. Put in words it was something like this: 'Here we are! You just watch how we are getting on. We are a bit late compared with other nations who arrived at the feast before. But now we shall get our proper share.' This may be called the behaviour and attitude of a parvenu and, ever since, Germany has been accused of throwing her weight about, like a nation unrestrained by experience and tradition. The explanation is not difficult if we consider the whole story of German decline that has been outlined in this book. The Reich was a new thing. It was not what it pretended to be, a revival of a glorious past. Prussia, strengthened and at the same time vulgarized by the industrial revolution, had conquered Germany. The economic and military success achieved by powers opposed to tradition was the source of the new mentality which developed under Bismarck and reached its full force under the reign of the Kaiser. All the while the true substance of German life was squandered and neglected.

Small benefit did Germany draw from her 'Reich'! The gifts which the Bismarck era bestowed upon the German nation were not unlike the contents of Pandora's box: 'a numberless plague, countless, assailing our lives, for ever they come in silence; for Zeus in his wisdom left them dumb.' (Hesiod). Barracks and factories—military and industrial power were these gifts, and the evils proceeding from them were indeed countless and dumb. It was difficult for the afflicted nation to perceive them. The drug of power, administered by the Prussian physician, began to affect the sensibility and judgement of the German nation, or at least of decisive numbers. In the next chapter we shall see that in spite of these harmful developments tradition was still preserved.

Bismarck won Sadowa and Sedan; his victory over Germany, however, was never complete.

## VII

### AUSTRIA

AUSTRIA has been called the citadel of ancient Germany. There is some truth in that statement, but it is always wrong to idealize Austria in order to blacken the Reich or Prussia. The weakness of Austrian policy can be frankly admitted, it must be, for otherwise the 'conflict of patriotic loyalties' which is so important a fact in modern German history, cannot be understood. But it remains true that Austria has managed to preserve many German traditions, above all a certain way of life, which were severely shaken in the Reich.

The Austrian citadel has been taken by the Nazis. The annexation was preceded by an abortive *coup d'état* in 1934, which for the time being achieved nothing but the ghastly murder of Chancellor Dollfuss. In 1937 the enemy broke into the fortress, supported—it is true—by a good deal of Austrian help and acquiescence. But in spite of this, it seems fair to say that Austria is at the present moment (1941) an occupied country. The purpose of this chapter is to give an idea of the specific Austrian mentality, its character and its sources of inspiration. We must study significant manifestations of the Austrian mind provided they are not isolated achievements of exceptional individuals but closely linked up with the typical life and temperament of the whole nation. No better source of information can be sought for than the work of the poet, for he is the most competent interpreter of his nation's character. The Austrian poet I choose is Adalbert Stifter. He was born on the 23rd of October 1805, a few weeks before the battle of Austerlitz. He died in January 1868, a year after Prussia's victory over Austria. Stifter was a peasant's son and this presumably enabled him to become the interpreter, not only of the beauty of nature, but of the unchanging wisdom of country life. He was a studious man, pedantic in his habits, and became, eventually, director of education in Linz. Two political events greatly disturbed and unsettled him: the revolution of 1848 and the defeat of Austria in 1866. Stifter felt at home in the Austria of Prince Metternich; he knew the great statesman personally, having been the tutor of one of his sons. When Metternich's order broke down Stifter tried to adapt himself to the new political conditions, but he did so with many misgivings. The second event, Prussia's triumph over Austria, was a blow from which the poet never recovered.

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Stifter's art is of the highest order. The work that needs particular emphasis from the point of view of this book is his novel, *Nachsommer* (The End of Summer), a long novel of about 900 pages. The plot is very simple and certainly not thrilling, but the book absorbs the reader's interest in a way that usually only the quiet contemplation of visible objects can do. It is the story of a youth who comes under the beneficial influence of an old man, living in the country on his model estate. That is all as far as events are concerned, but this masterpiece of German literature reveals, I think, the secret of human life, its dignity, its responsibilities and its happiness. No explicit philosophy is offered, yet the position of man is clearly outlined against the background of nature and all the powers of earth and heaven; there is no haste, there is no distortion—the profound serenity of that great book is unsurpassed. Needless to say that *Nachsommer* is an important document for the student of the German problem, for there he finds German traditions unimpaired. The novel was published in 1857, nine years before the battle of Sadowa. No shadow of Prussia and what it stands for darkens Stifter's world, nor have the destructive forces of the industrial revolution entered the human landscape of his poetical work. But it would be wrong to assume that these omissions are due to the poet's romanticism and dreamy disposition which build up an imaginary world no longer existing. The important point to grasp is this: Stifter is no romantic, he is a realist. He only talks about things that exist and takes no interest in dreams and inventions. He is an ardent lover of the actual world that surrounds man and supports him. He endeavours to describe this world and he does so in a humble yet highly competent way. I should like to quote a passage from the introduction of one of his works. The poet defends himself against his critics who had remarked that he was only interested in small things. The passage reveals Stifter's philosophy of life.

'But as we have entered upon the subject of greatness and smallness I should like to give my views, which presumably will differ from those of many other men. The breeze of the air, the gentle flow of water, the growth of corn, the waves of the sea, the vegetation of the earth, the bright sky and the shining stars—all these I consider great. The thunder-storm, the flash of lightning which destroys the homes of men, the volcano, the earthquake, all these manifestations I do not consider greater than those mentioned before. I consider them smaller because they are only the indications of much higher laws. The power that makes the milk boil



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over in the pot of a poor woman is the same that forces up the lava of the volcano. . . . These manifestations are only more conspicuous, therefore they attract the attention of the superficial and uninstructed. . . . It is the same with the human race. A life full of justice, simplicity and self-control, a life of reasonable self-limitation enriched by the enjoyment of beauty and ending in a calm death—such a life I consider great. Mighty emotions, devastating fury, thirst for revenge, an inflammable mind striving for action, pulling down, changing and destroying (often its own life as well)—such things I consider smaller, not greater, for they are but the outcome of isolated forces, like storms, volcanoes and earthquakes.’

These words give, I think, a clear idea of Stifter’s outlook on life. They express the serenity and calmness of a mind that regards man as part of a whole, limited in his scope and ambition but also enriched and sustained by the eternal order of God and His creation. Such wisdom, however, is never the personal finding of one man, however great he may be.

It is the unprogressive Germany nourished by the accumulated wisdom of her traditions that becomes apparent in Stifter’s work—it is Austria.

The problem arises: Why was Austria unprogressive compared with other parts of Germany; why was she less responsive to the powerful spirit of the time, less adaptable to it? It is with the greatest caution that one should approach general questions of that kind, for a problem thus stated covers so wide a field that it seems practically impossible to deal with it in an adequate and competent way. All I can attempt here is to give a few hints which can hardly be taken as a proper answer to the question. It must be remembered that the general task I have set myself is limited. My object is to study a mentality, an attitude, a frame of mind, to describe its character and to discriminate, if possible, between its various elements. Therefore it seems obvious that the political frontier which separates Austria from South Germany cannot be regarded as a dividing line of great significance as far as our problems are concerned. That Austria was excluded from the Reich and not exposed to Prussian infiltration and domination is certainly a very important fact; but, as already said, Bismarck’s victory was incomplete. What applies to Austria applies therefore very often to Bavaria and other parts of Germany. Austria stands for Germany—this was generally believed and accepted by the Germans for nearly five centuries—it is still true to-day, though it

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is no longer a widespread common belief and certainly not a political fact. The reader is asked to remember this whilst we consider the general reasons for Austria's power of resistance.

1. Rural life is still intact. There is a peasantry. The absorption of the country by the towns, that process of devastation, has not gone far enough to kill, or reduce to nothingness, the independence of agriculture within the system of national economy. This fact has many implications. A peasantry that can live on its soil without being the victim of commercial power and moneylenders residing in the town, is certainly the most valuable asset which a country can possess. A nation whose rural life has been crippled lacks a sphere where human experience can widen and mature, or in other words, where traditions can firmly take root and be preserved. Towns consume; that is true in every sense. They have their proper highly important functions, yet they need the basis of a healthy agriculture.

2. Austria is an ancient nation. One might retort that all nations are, but there is this difference: an old man who has lost his memory can draw but little benefit from his former experiences—he has forgotten them. The same with nations. A nation which does not remember can hardly be called old. It will behave in many ways as foolishly as an inexperienced youngster, a trying spectacle for older nations. But where is this memory of a nation to be found? Does such a thing really exist? It does, but it is a subtle organ. The nation's memory cannot be acquired, built up or preserved through instruction. It is certainly not compulsory education we should rely upon if we wish to strengthen this valuable capacity. On the contrary, it is not unfair to say after one hundred years of experiment that compulsory education, whatever its practical use may be, cannot be ranked among the civilizing forces of this world. The nation's memory is based on one simple fact; the past must still be present, experienced and felt as an effective part of daily life, not just taught by schoolmasters, who again have been taught by other schoolmasters, so that they might pass on that knowledge (mostly sterile). A Tyrolean peasant boy who lives on a farm which his family has owned for many hundred years lives in the past; a clever young student who got a first in history, may be, in spite of that, a hopeless citizen of Suburbia, swayed by the follies of the day. The mature wisdom, the gentle scepticism, the amused contempt of fussy energy—all these typical signs of an ancient civilization can be

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found in Austria. An old nation, just like an old man, is not unduly impressed by some new 'movement' that makes a lot of noise and claims to be salvation of some kind or the other. Old age knows that there is always a great deal of humbug in the world—humbug of wealth, humbug of ambition, humbug of power. Old age knows that human happiness has to be sought for elsewhere, but the wisdom of old age does not always appeal to the young. To lie low when the tempest blows may seem the advice of a coward, but the broken oak uprooted by the storm can teach the lesson that there is something in that rather unattractive advice: a strong instinct to survive. I suspect that the shrewd principle of lying low was very much in the mind of many Italians when they accepted Fascism. They are an old race, too, they may surrender, but they do not surrender in their hearts, they do not deceive themselves. The cynic is a healthier and more respectable type than the victim of self-deception. To come back to Austria: old things are still alive there to such an extent that the nation's memory is a real force storing up and using the experience of generations. I remember an incident a few years before the war. I was staying in South Tyrol, that ancient Austrian province where the Italians have tried to uproot German traditions and to impose their Fascist sham civilization. It was right in the middle of a grave European crisis. I was talking to a peasant woman. She looked out of the window quietly on to the autumn landscape of her native valley and then suddenly remarked, 'Everything is all right with nature, the Almighty has seen to that. Only man is the fool.' This simple woman, leading a life full of toil and worry (as most people do) had nevertheless the detachment of a sage. She realized the element of humbug in human affairs; many smart and clever people, their heads full of knowledge and ideas, do not. They are panting after success, fretting and fussing about—they are, properly speaking, fools.

3. Among the living powers of the past which enrich and sustain Austrian life, the Catholic Church must be mentioned first. There is one aspect of Catholicism that is of paramount importance and strikes the observer forcibly. It has little to do with the systematic doctrine and theology of the Roman Church, it is the element of poetry which permeates the daily life and proceeds from the Church, her services, her institutions and her functions. I know well that theologians, Catholics and Protestants alike, will repudiate this point of view as being a sign of aestheticism which misses the essentials. But I have dealt with this rigid

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attitude already in the fourth chapter of this book. Let so much be repeated here: Poetry is a great civilizing force because it introduces its richness of associations into our daily experience and thus deepens and intensifies the impressions which the simple, basic facts of life make upon us. Let us take as an example of Church poetry the Catholic evening service, the Compline. The superb structure of this service, its balance, its variety and inner life, has often been remarked upon. Note the beginning: 'Noctem quietam et finem perfectum concedat nobis Dominus omnipotens'. The Confiteor—the heavenly hosts appearing in full array, vividly appealing to the imagination, is followed by the Psalms and the ancient hymn, 'Te lucis ante terminum . . .' The magic of twilight and the dangers of darkness are expressed in this poem of truly Roman brevity. De Quincey, writing about the Anglican evening service (which derives its force from the remnants of Catholic tradition which it contains), sums up the effect of these invocations:

'Greatly was that effect deepened by the symbolic treatment which this liturgy gives to this darkness and to these perils. Naturally, when contemplating that treatment, I had been led vividly to feel the magical power of evocation which Christianity has put forth here and in parallel cases. The ordinary physical rhabdomanist, who undertakes to evoke from the dark chambers of our earth wells of water lying far below its surface, and more rarely to evoke minerals, or hidden deposits of jewels and gold, by some magnetic sympathy between his rod and the occult object of his divination, is able to indicate the spot at which this object can be hopefully sought for. Not otherwise has the marvellous magnetism of Christianity called up from darkness sentiments the most august, previously inconceivable, formless and without life; but also at the same time by incarnating these sentiments in images of corresponding grandeur, it has so exalted their character as to lodge them eternally in human hearts.'

De Quincey is right. The Compline (even more than the Anglican liturgy) evokes all the powers of the closing day; but can this be done without the proper setting? Must not the shadows of evening descend upon the lanes and the great calm appear? Torn away from the background which it sets out to interpret, this poetry will die, though the words remain.

Innumerable Christians of many generations who have listened to this evening service and have grown familiar with its peculiar charm, whatever their age, their nationality, their position in life might have been—Bavarian peasants, fishermen in Sicily or

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artisans in Flemish towns, they were all put, as if it were by magic, into the place of those two men 'who went to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about three score furlongs' And they joined in the request of the two disciples as their fathers had done: 'Abide with us for it is toward evening and the day is far spent.' Such is the power of this ancient service. It needs but little sensibility, it certainly needs no faith in the divine truth of Catholic dogmas to realize that Catholicism, closely woven into the texture of daily life and endowed with wisdom, with beauty and the charm of poetry, must be a force in Austria, that cannot be easily brushed aside but holds its own ground. There is a living tradition and its substance is rich. The conservative strength of such forces is so great that there cannot be a sweeping victory of any power working for far-reaching innovations and changes. The resistance offered is of a rather indirect and passive nature: the impatient impetus of new energies is slowed down, that is all, but it might decide the whole issue. The onslaught may thus be repulsed, its intensity, which is the real danger, be broken.

But it is not only the conservative character of a living religious tradition which gives Catholicism this power of resistance. There is a social philosophy behind it, ready to step forward, to challenge and to fight. This is not the place to deal with this vast subject. Suffice it to say, even the non-Catholic will readily admit, that the Papal encyclicals of Leo XIII and Pius XI expounding the attitude of the Church towards modern social, economic, and political developments, reveal a consistent political philosophy, cautiously outlined but perfectly clear. More than that: if we survey the whole field of modern controversy centring round the problems of capitalism, we shall discover, perhaps with surprise, that there are not many fighters in the arena who have a well-equipped arsenal at their disposal. Roughly speaking, there are only two sets of combatants. Those who say: 'Let us push ahead; everything will come right in the end', and the others who say: 'Let us try to stop. We seem to be on the wrong road. We may have to go back to find the right road again.' These are, I think, the only two attitudes which appeal to clear minds and provide at least a proper basis for discussion. The first set of fighters includes both capitalists and communists; they have, in spite of their deadly animosity, too many things in common, like father and son; they both accept the economic industrial development that has overtaken us, as an inevitable process, a law of nature or a law of history, and they fully appreciate the whole thing as

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such. The Catholic Church has taken up her position in the opposite camp, hostile to those fatalists. In defending private property, the institution of marriage, the right of parents to educate their children, the Church cannot help fighting Communism and Capitalism alike. One cannot say that the Catholic Church has been very successful in this struggle. One might also add that her philosophy is highly superior to her politics—anyway, the tide was very much against her and still seems to be. All that has been achieved in certain provinces of Christendom, e.g. Austria, where the Church holds power, is nothing more than retardation. But who would wish to belittle this if the alternative is an increased intensity of disintegration, veiled as progress?

I should like to conclude this tentative survey of the Austrian position with some further remarks about Adalbert Stifter. This will lead us back to the German problem in general. At the beginning of his literary career, when he was still very much influenced by Jean Paul, Stifter found much response. But his later works, which fully display his own style and character, were received with many criticisms. The general tendency of the time was certainly not in his favour. Hebbel made the silly remark about one of Stifter's great novels: 'Whoever manages to plod through this book deserves the crown of Bohemia.' Things grew worse for Stifter and his fame as time went on. The later nineteenth century found him tasteless and dull. It looked as if his works might be shelved for good. Nietzsche's attitude was different. He called the *Nachsommer* one of the best German books ever written. He thus opposed the popular verdict of his time as he did in so many other questions. The twentieth century saw Stifter's resurrection. After the Great War a certain section of the younger generation turned to him again with amazing keenness. This seemed to foreshadow profound changes. I noticed with horror that even the school authorities began to yield to this 'fashion', they put some of Stifter's work on the curriculum. For in spite of his laudable intentions the schoolmaster sometimes fails to achieve what he sets out to do; often the effect of his labours is to frighten young people away from the great poets of their race, who might have become their chosen guardians, had not the school interfered.

The revival of Stifter was not an isolated symptom. There were other signs as well. A very few modern German authors seem to have found their way back to the old tradition without being in any way romantic; they are definitely modern. Hans Carossa

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must be mentioned here. He was born in 1878 in Upper Bavaria. Carossa is a doctor by profession and has written only a few books, most of them autobiographical. The wisdom and the *noblesse* that once found expression in Stifter's work have not vanished, nor have they been crushed by the vulgarity of the time; disintegration has not proceeded to the very core—that is the joyful hope which Carossa's work transmits. It may be that pre-capitalist and pre-Prussian Germany begins to emerge from the welter of this time and comes to life again, first, of course, in the minds of men.

Practical people might say: 'It is of little use to know what books young men are reading in their spare time and who their favourite poets are. That does not affect the urgent issues of the time.' I disagree. Some thirty years ago young Germans read Nietzsche (they read him less now, I understand), but this reading bore fruit. The philosophy of Nihilism, to which Nietzsche has contributed so much, is to-day a living force and, unfortunately, not only a subject for academic debate. Therefore I maintain that the revival of Stifter and the appreciation of kindred poets in Germany is a most important sign, it may be a token of the future. There can be no certainty about such things; tender beginnings can be swamped and crushed, but to belittle them on principle would be wrong.

## VIII

### POST-WAR GERMANY: THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

THE best book that has been written about the German collapse (and the preceding stages during the war) is the *Memoirs of Prince Max von Baden*. As an historical work it is a masterpiece, most carefully written, well balanced and full of documentary evidence. We must study now the nature of the German collapse and its implications.

Ernst Jünger, one of the German 'Nihilists', wrote in 1934: 'The real test of a government is not the amount of applause which it receives but defeat in war.' The régime of the Kaiser stood this test badly. After Ludendorff's great offensive had failed, the German military situation became extremely difficult. The reserves had been used up. At the beginning of August 1918 it became clear to the German High Command that Germany was going to lose the war. A Council of State was held on the 14th of August. The Emperor, the Crown Prince, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the Chancellor Count Hertling and the Foreign Secretary were present. The minutes of this meeting have been published since.

The gravity of the situation was fully revealed, the Emperor himself drew the conclusion which his councillors—so it seems—hesitated to mention: the war cannot be won and must be brought to an end through negotiations. It was a critical moment. If the German Government had acted immediately upon the conclusion at which the Council of State had arrived, it might have been possible to avert catastrophe. But no action was taken, so catastrophe came, and this was the shape it took: At the end of September there was an outbreak of panic at the German High Command; General Ludendorff lost his nerves and insisted upon an immediate request for an armistice within the next twenty-four hours. This coincided with a change of cabinet: Prince Max von Baden succeeded Hertling. It is unnecessary to follow the further stages in detail, the game was up, the statesmanlike qualities of Prince Max were wasted on an impossible task. On the 15th of October he wrote to the Grand Duke of Baden:

'I did not realize the complete collapse of the old Prussian system until I arrived here. I shrunk back first when I saw that no military power was left to back my policy and that we were



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defeated. . . . I thought I would arrive at five minutes to twelve but I was only called at five past.'

The collapse of the Kaiser's régime was like the sudden outbreak of a mighty conflagration dealt with by an entirely perplexed fire brigade, rushing to and fro looking for their implements, crying out for water-buckets and eventually disappearing swiftly from the field of action.

The revolution which then broke out was, properly speaking, no revolution at all. The whole thing was decomposition. We must discriminate between two currents of revolutionary activity in those days:

1. A wave of riots spreading from a mutiny of sailors in Kiel to a great number of towns. Disreputable elements were the leaders and active participants of these exploits; the rabble stirred. The riots found growing public support and sympathy because an underfed and famine-stricken population welcomed events (even though forced upon them) which brought the war to an end. The English blockade bore fruit. But the rioters received even more substantial and effective support, their movement became political and deliberately Communist. Thus an idea was adopted which could provide a clear line for action. It must be understood, however, that this revolutionary movement represented only a very small, though active, minority which could hardly hope to muster sufficient military strength. It was formidable during the initial stages of the revolution through lack of resistance on the opponent's side.

2. The Social Democrats. They had long ceased to be a revolutionary party. The days of August Bebel, who still talked about the 'great smashing up' (*Kladderadatsch*), had passed. Now leaders of the party had become Excellencies and Ministers of the Crown. Scheidemann was a member of the Cabinet. When the riots started the Social Democrats felt they could hardly stay at home. Was this not, after all, a revolution? So, under the pressure of events which they considered deplorable, these men tried to discover their rebel's heart, and joined the revolution with all the misgivings of a *bourgeois*. Actually they did not join the revolution—they killed it. Ebert, whom Prince Max had appointed as his successor, and who was now the head of the new provisional government, suppressed, with the help of reactionary troops, the riotous Communist movement. The issue was decided when the Spartacus Group, led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg,

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was defeated in Berlin. The two Communist leaders were murdered after they had been taken prisoners.

That this kind of revolution should have swept away the Kaiser's régime, that defeat in war immediately meant collapse, surely, these facts revealed an astonishing weakness. The moment Prussia loses power she is reduced to nothingness. After what has been said in previous chapters, this will not cause surprise.

What was the country's reaction to the change of government? The general elections in January 1919 brought to life a big democratic party. It was an overnight growth.

'We have to accept accomplished facts' ('wir müssen uns auf den Boden der Tatsachen stellen') was a phrase one could often hear in those days. Fourteen years later, when the Nazis came into power, one could hear it again, with the significant addition, 'by joining the party we must prevent the worst'. What have they prevented, these condoners? There is not much to be expected from good weather friends. The large democratic party in 1919 signified nothing but the readiness of millions to find an easy compromise. It did not signify the rise of democracy in Germany. The public showed no interest whatsoever when the newly elected National Assembly worked out the new super-democratic constitution. Adolf Hoffman, a socialist, who was a ruffian but a witty man, remarked in the Prussian Parliament: 'The country takes no more interest in your labours, gentlemen, than in the debates of the Pipesmokers' Club, "Blue Smoke", solemnly framing its constitution.' The National Assembly went to Weimar because the Spartacus riots in Berlin were not yet over. Weimar was chosen deliberately. The war propaganda of the Allies had discriminated between the spirit of Potsdam and the spirit of Weimar. German professors and authors retorted vehemently that both Weimar and Potsdam were manifestations of the same national genius. Even Thomas Mann joined the chorus and wrote a propaganda pamphlet on Frederick the Great. Now the German Republic, the outcome of defeat, endeavoured to link up the fragile existence of the new State with the literary traditions of Weimar. Surely an ill-advised attempt, an unconvincing gesture! In a previous chapter of this book the value of the Weimar tradition, and also its limitations, have been discussed. The German Republic, however, invoked this spirit in vain. It was a propaganda move, a plea: we are harmless. Tribute must be paid to many of these men, particularly to Fritz Ebert; they honestly

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tried their best, they were in a practically hopeless position; but the fact remains and must be stated that German democracy was born in such uninspiring circumstances, the product of defeat, compromise, and fear, that its prospects were gloomy right from the beginning. It was a thing without foundations. The loyalty of its citizens is the one all-important source of strength no State can dispense with. Was it likely that new republican loyalties would grow up from so feeble a seed? If not, the State was doomed.

But was it not possible to give German democracy new life in spite of these sordid beginnings? It is often overlooked and forgotten that Germany had a democratic tradition which was by no means negligible. Two facts represent it: the influence of the French Revolution and Napoleonic times still felt in the south and west of Germany and the great revolution of 1848. This revolution ended in defeat but it was a most memorable event. Prussia had killed this tradition by discrediting it. Prussia ridicules lost causes, she does not believe in them. This lack of chivalry is, as we have seen, the main weakness of her morale. The noble aspirations of 1848 were labelled as 'the revolutions of dons and professors' who did nothing but talk. Then Bismarck came—the Prussian legend went on—and solved the German question through 'blood and iron'. He showed how the thing had to be done. Here we have a striking example of Prussia's destructive and dissolving influence. The memories of 1848 which might have saved the situation in 1919 were dead. The Weimar Republic adopted the colours of 1848: black, red, and gold. Thus, unintentionally, the flag of Bismarck's Reich, black, white, and red, with its vivid Prussian associations, was handed over to the anti-republican opposition—the enemy of democracy received a rallying banner. Again, it was a well-meant move, but it worked in the opposite direction. I strongly believe traditions can be revived. The process of revival, however, is subtle and escapes analysis. We can only say tentatively: revival must be deserved. The leaders and representatives of the German Republic lacked the power of invocation; their call was feeble, it could not raise the dead. Nothing less was demanded.

There was, I think, one chance left for the Weimar Republic to gain the moral authority which it so bitterly lacked. The Treaty of Versailles offered this chance. Had the German republicans been able and willing to refuse their signature, to rally the nation behind them, ready to bear all consequences of

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this policy—then the German Republic might have been reborn in this struggle of resistance. But only under one condition: the thing had to be done without Prussia's help. It had to be the struggle of the republic; a new force in German history had to prove itself. That is the way new powers rise. Severe tests establish authority, nothing else does. I know well that the task just outlined would have been herculean; humanly speaking, impossible. The German nation was exhausted and weary. The blockade was still upon her. A few months before the régime of the Kaiser had not dared to rally the people for a last desperate fight of resistance. Walter Rathenau had advocated the plan, but it was dropped. Resistance against Versailles could not have meant war, that was ruled out. But a firm resolution to endure and not to give in was indeed demanded. I repeat, humanly speaking, it was impossible. But when the Committee of Public Safety established itself in France in 1793, when Lazaire Carnot left Paris to organize the last stand against the invader, whilst civil war raged and darkness hung over France—then, too, one might have said: there is no chance.

To sum up: The new powers in Germany were called into office by Prussia (the Kaiser's government) at the moment of defeat; they were defended by Prussia (the reactionary troops) against the Communist revolution; they established themselves in an undignified way. The Weimar Republic, lacking true foundations and incapable of reviving the democratic memories and traditions of 1848, which Prussia had killed, started her precarious career without life and without promise.

The post-war situation, however, contained one positive element: Prussia had been defeated. Her defeat inside Germany stood in marked contrast to her conduct in war: the defeat was ignominious. All glitter and glory, all pride and presumption went. The generals hastily packed their uniforms away (not forgetting the moth-balls) and walked about in mufti. Ludendorff fled to Sweden, wearing black spectacles and assuming the name of Lindström. A great chance was offered. But the chance was missed. Twenty years later Prussia had risen again, stronger than ever. Why did this happen? There are two main reasons: the post-war policy of the Allies and the incompetence and futility of the anti-Prussian reaction inside Germany. I shall deal with the two points separately.

This is not the place to discuss the details of the Versailles Treaty and the treaty of the fourteen points which preceded it.

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The reader who has followed the line of argument so far will not expect me to make the wrongs of Versailles mainly responsible for our present troubles. But the contribution of Versailles to these troubles was considerable. It must not be forgotten that there was a widespread readiness in Germany to believe in peaceful European co-operation based on justice and equality after the régime of the Kaiser had broken down. Many of these new German democrats were, I admit, 'reformed characters' through nothing but the shock of defeat, but reformed they were, and their hasty conversion was certainly the most salubrious effect which the war had produced. These trusting and bewildered people were taught a lesson. Their disbelief in political idealism, in anything resembling President Wilson's slogans, was firmly established. The statesmen of the Allies were, up to a certain point, the victims of their own war propaganda; public opinion urged them on. The Hun was beaten; is there any difference between a democratic and a militaristic Hun? Such was the reaction. Little importance was attributed to the change of régime in Germany. Thus the policy was started to enforce Versailles and to make the League of Nations the guarantor of the Treaty. We are only concerned with one aspect of this policy, its psychological effect on Germany. The German champions of European co-operation, the Social Democrats and the Democrats, went from failure to failure. They were manœuvred by the course of events into the position of fools and dreamers who did not know the world, or worse, of cowards and traitors who were ready to bow to merciless enemies regardless of human and national dignity. The critical and decisive period was from 1919 to 1925. The Treaty of Locarno was the turning point. The atmosphere had changed. Concessions were made; but when Stresemann struggled for Germany's independence, he was already up against a formidable ever-growing opposition, ready to belittle his diplomatic success and definitely hostile to the general tendency of his policy. The system of Weimar and all it stood for had by then become a term of derision. A list of dates will make this clear. The Treaty of Locarno was ratified on the 16th of October 1925; Germany entered the League of Nations in September 1926; February 1925, Hitler, released from prison, refounded his party and started his propaganda campaign all over Germany; in March 1925 Hindenburg was elected President of the Reich. On the 3rd of October 1929 Stresemann died; three months later Dr. Frick became a member of the Government in Thuringia—the

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first Nazi who assumed office. In March 1930 Dr Brüning became Chancellor and formed a Cabinet without the Social-Democrats. It was his irksome task to fight a losing battle for the German Republic. In May 1922 he was replaced by Herr von Papen. On the 13th of August Hitler felt strong enough to demand from Hindenburg the same position as Mussolini assumed after his march to Rome. The Field-Marshal declined: 'My conscience forbids me to grant this,' he said. Five months later, in January 1933, he made Hitler Chancellor of the Reich. Papen had persuaded him.

Surveying these facts, we come to the following conclusion: the policy of the Allies weakened the authority of the German Republic irreparably and strengthened the opposition. The nature of this opposition will be discussed in the next chapter. We must now examine the anti-Prussian reaction inside Germany. Having explained its failure our task will be completed; it will be clear why the defeat of Prussia bore no fruit.

It is an undeniable principle applying to military and spiritual struggles as well that an enemy can only be overcome if he is defeated in his strength. Should only the caricature of the opponent be exposed to ridicule and derision then the whole combat is nothing more than a sham fight. One might answer that, according to this, all great historical controversies, e.g. the Reformation, must have been sham fights. Luther's polemical tirades against the Papists certainly do not convey a fair picture of Catholicism. But Luther maintained that he himself was Catholic and orthodox; he accused his enemies of apostasy. Whether he was right or not does not concern us now, what matters is this: Luther claimed that all the true virtues of Christian religion, the old sanctity of the Church, were on his side—the Roman Church was just an empty shell; this was his strategy, if we may use this word. This certainly was not a sham fight. The anti-Prussian reaction in Germany took up a very different position. A campaign of unrestrained derision and mockery set in. The level of these publications was very low. In style and spirit they resembled the Russian anti-God propaganda—not only the spite, the silliness was amazing. I mention one example: 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles!' by Tucholsky. Anti-militarism was the battle-cry. Very different people were prepared to follow its call. Communists, who longed for civil war, republicans who believed in the League of Nations, highbrows and aesthetes, unrelenting pacifists—they all joined together. It was to be expected that a strong wave of pacifism should have swept

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Europe after the Great War. In Germany practically the whole literature turned pacifist in tone and general attitude. If this new pacifism had only been less muddle-headed and less cantankerous! To depict the gruesome horrors of war as realistically as possible was considered an argument. It was *the* argument. Many artists did their utmost to supply vivid illustrations. Some of their works, though repugnant, had force and quality (e.g. Otto Dix and Georg Gross). The soldiers killed in battle were abused; it was said they had fallen on 'the field of dishonour'; the Generals were called criminals. The index of a book written by a certain Hiller included this item: 'Hindenburg—see Mass murderer'. All this was not only base, it was stupid. It defeated its own ends. In Chapter II of this book I have discussed the bad effects of muddle-headed anti-militarism. Compared with these propagandists of peace and their nasty output, a Prussian drill sergeant was an attractive figure. The post-war pacifists were unintentionally Prussia's allies, her secret agents. They seemed quite oblivious of the fact that the Prussian tradition did not only represent vices and weaknesses, and they were incapable of finding a substitute for Prussia's virtues—they themselves being purely negative and feeble, entirely out of touch with any real tradition. To defy 'Capua' was not within their power (see Chapter II). The anti-militaristic reaction in Germany, though unchallenged for some time and very busy and self-assertive, was no sign of new life, no creative effort. Old things were rotting away—that was the impression. The odour of decay was unmistakable.

But there were deeper currents in German life than these manifestations of resentment. There was a great sincerity among the younger generation, a deep longing for truth, a firm resolution to find a way out of the spiritual and political anarchy of the time. This spirit, I think, can be traced back to the trenches and dug-outs of the Great War. A good deal of nonsense was talked amongst soldiers, as everybody knows, but there were rare and unforgettable moments when conversations took place which were more sincere, more essential than the arguments and discussions of ordinary life. The dons had not an easy time with the young soldiers returning from the war and taking up their studies. It has been said that post-war Germany became more and more Russian, that the spirit of the brothers Karamazov was entering the country, altering the spiritual landscape. This certainly applies not to the nation as a whole. But there is truth in the statement. Dostoevsky, the great hater of Germany, the man who so

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clearly perceived the atheism of the *bourgeois* world, found his best readers among the German youth. They read him like a sacred book and they were right in doing so. All this was not without danger. Dostoevsky can lead astray. European men need—to put it briefly—the classical mediterranean element of their tradition in order ‘to keep their souls alive.’ It is of course not the knowledge of Greek and Latin that is required though the fading away of classical education is a grave symptom. What the Graeco-Roman civilisation has contributed to our inheritance is—among other gifts—the undisputed value of sanity. On the whole Western Christianity always stressed the point that the supernatural order is based on nature unimpaired, that it is not necessarily the abnormal and the insane who are the truly initiated. This truth, however, is missing in Dostoevsky’s work. The grandeur of his Christian philosophy makes him a most suitable teacher and a powerful Christian apologist, but only if he leads on to other teachers greater than himself. The German youth was led nowhere. Nothing came out of this passionate expectancy (so far as we know), but there was something strong and profound at work. I think it would be right to say: the genius of the German nation stirred.

It is difficult to advise the student of German affairs who would like to read some documentary evidence of these important spiritual endeavours. There are only a few German authors who reflect this spirit dimly. Not more. I mention Hermann Hesse and Hans Carossa. It is significant that these authors are also in contact with the older, pre-Prussian and pre-industrial German traditions. A brilliant and in many ways representative writer like Thomas Mann belongs to quite a different category. He draws his inspirations from a rich but decomposing soil. He represents the cultivated nineteenth-century *bourgeoisie* and his best works deal—most competently—with the problem of decay. But Hesse and Carossa, though fully aware of all the instability around us, are sustained in an inexplicable way by living ancient tradition. At the same time they are highly sensitive to the healing forces of our time and their slow and secret work.

We have now covered the whole ground of our problem. We have examined the weakness of the Weimar Republic, the implications of Versailles, the incompetence of German anti-militarism, and the first signs of a new beginning which (for the time being) led to nothing. The next Chapter will be devoted to the Nazi Movement which set out to conquer Republican Germany and accomplished it.



## IX

### THE HITLER MOVEMENT

PRINCE MAX VON BADEN wrote in 1923: 'The spirit of civil war is sweeping the whole country, Germany no longer respects her own history. The morals of the Balkans have infected our towns, also our politics, so that in the end the deceived younger generation has come to believe: You can be a murderer in Germany without being defamed.' Let us accept the term 'morals of the Balkans' without debating its justification—one might feel inclined to put up a defence for the Balkan nations—the opinion of Prince Max cannot be misunderstood: the moral standards which befit a civilized nation are badly shaken in Germany and the younger people are affected most by this general moral deterioration. Nobody who knows the post-war situation in Germany will be ready to contradict this.

It is out of the welter of profound deterioration that the Nazi movement arose. Two problems confront us:

1. What was the cause of this deterioration?
2. Is the Nazi Movement what it claims to be—a successful attempt to check national decline, to prevent further retrogression and to start the work of reconstruction and regeneration?

It seems only fair to examine these Nazi claims before offering a different interpretation. The first problem has been dealt with in previous chapters. I give a short summary. The intrinsic weakness of Germany is the cause of her deterioration. When the plaster of power and wealth fell off this weakness became apparent. The Bismarck Reich had wasted Germany's true substance.

The test of defeat was more than Germany could stand; the nation, misguided by Prussia and undermined in her strength, broke down. The roots of the trouble were deep; the immediate causes, however, which brought about sudden changes and altered the surface of national life, were near at hand. Let us now survey the facts. What kind of misfortune befell the average German citizen after the war, the man who now, presumably, walks about with the Swastika Badge in his buttonhole?

1. *The experience of the sudden and unexpected defeat in the war.* Public opinion in Germany was unprepared; when the gravity of

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the military situation had to be revealed it came as a shock to the vast majority of the population. It was not only the man in the street who had lived in a fool's paradise; leading parliamentarians, even statesmen and members of the Cabinet, had been misinformed or had not thought it their duty to insist upon full information. The leader of the Conservatives, Herr von Heydebrand, whom people called the uncrowned King of Prussia, is supposed to have exclaimed: 'We have been swindled and deceived!' On the 2nd of October 1918 an emissary of the German High Command, Major von dem Bussche, had to inform the leading deputies of the Reichstag what the military situation was like. Here is a description of this meeting:

'The deputies were downcast, Ebert became white as death and could not utter a word, Stresemann looked as though he would collapse. . . . The Cabinet Minister von Waldow is said to have left the room with the words: "There is nothing left now but to blow one's brains out."'

No wonder, therefore, that the average citizen was completely taken by surprise when defeat overcame his country.

2. *The Revolution.* The régime of the Kaiser vanished overnight. The proud edifice that seemed to offer security for all time to come crumbled into dust. Why was there no resistance, no defence? Where had the paladins gone to who used to surround this throne in the happy days of the past? Only a very small minority of the people took an active part in this so-called Revolution; the population as a whole was bewildered, passive and perplexed.

3. *The humiliation and failure of the German Republic.* This has been dealt with in the previous chapter. The hopes of those who clung to the new political ideas were disappointed. I need not repeat my criticisms about the character and validity of these hopes, but hopes they were and the disappointment was real.

4. *Unemployment and inflation.* The feeling of security vanished. The hope for economic improvement in the near future went too. The inflation reached its climax in 1923. By then the savings of the middle-classes had gone. The prospects for the young were gloomy, no profession wanted them. The figures of unemployment were steadily rising. In 1931 came the great financial crisis: a leading Austrian bank broke down, great German banks were affected. Another illusion which many simple souls might still have nourished had to be given up; the strongholds of finance

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seemed to crumble. So far the banks had weathered the storm which swept aside Emperors, Kings, and the happiness of millions. The unconquerable strength of finance is a popular myth in modern times, the enemies of money power believe in it no less than the small and ever dwindling group of friends. For many people it is one of the few things they really believe in.

5. *The irritation of contrast.* Whilst the nation as a whole had to undergo these bitter experiences, a small group of profiteers and new rich climbed up the social ladder. Inflation offered good opportunities for unscrupulous business men, and this undesirable class mingled with the politicians and displayed their ill-gotten wealth in an irritating way. It cannot be denied that the Jewish element became very conspicuous and domineering in society and public life. There had been a considerable Jewish immigration after the war and the predominance of the Jews in journalism, films, theatre (not to mention business), was widely resented. But let there be no misunderstanding: the situation which I have just outlined does not 'explain' the Nazi persecution of the Jews. These horrors have only *one* source and *one* explanation: the wicked and perverted minds of the persecutors. Closely related to the new rich was the political profiteer, the man who made a rapid career or gained other lucrative advantages because he belonged to one of the parties in power. Political corruption was certainly harmless compared with what was going to happen under Nazi rule—but corruption there was and it discredited the State and the existing form of government.

To sum up: In the post-war period the average German had to face a grim fact—most unpleasant to behold—the utter instability of State and Society. The general 'melting away', which Nietzsche prophesied forty years before, had come about.

Kleiner Mann, was nun?

Wenn alles schief geht, was dann tun?

(Little man, what now? If everything goes wrong, what are you going to do?)

The situation was desperate, gloom prevailed. Such was the general background of the Nazi Movement.

In 1922-3 I stayed in Munich. I have attended a Hitler meeting and I know well the general atmosphere of those days, the deadly savour of weary hopelessness and sullen despair. Hitler's effect on the stricken masses was stupendous. He transmitted hope.

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Nobody else did, neither inside nor outside of Germany. The speeches of Government spokesmen and other prominent figures of public life were funereal in tone and character; the more sincere and responsible the speakers were the more depressing was their message. Chancellor Brüning beat the record in that respect; he was too honest a man to encourage illusions. Hitler took a very different line. He knew his audience. They were mostly men in the grips of fear, people who felt that the last remnants of security were swept away by a strong current of anonymous forces. Hitler's trick was simple: he discarded truth. It matters little, so he thought, whether a statement is true so long as it is comforting and therefore readily accepted. That is self-deception. No other term fits the case. But it would be wrong to believe that Hitler started his political career as a Machiavellian demagogue. We cannot put him into so high a category. All Machiavellian principles demand an intellect entirely immune, one might even say dangerously immune, from the influence of emotions. This certainly is not Hitler's case. He, on the contrary, was the first victim of his own methods. One has to study *Mein Kampf* to find the clue to his personality. I ask the reader to refer to the early autobiographical chapters of that book, particularly to Hitler's account of his years in Vienna. It makes stiff reading, I admit; the dull verbosity is trying, but it is worth while plodding through. Hitler talks a good deal about his 'studies', a most striking euphemism, for he cannot have read anything except newspapers and political pamphlets. His unguided mind, nourishing bitter grievances against the world, accepted without hesitation any opinion which satisfied his emotions. There has never been a more gullible reader of newspaper trash. What makes men stir is true. Hitler never got much further than that in wrestling with the problem of truth. He knows, of course, that such things as lies exist. He appreciates and admires effective and successful lies in politics. He is a great liar himself. But that is not the crucial point. The crucial point is that he does not know what truth is. His truth is self-deception. Such is the mentality of the man who set out to save a despairing nation and to restore a rotting society.

I shall now examine the methods of Nazi propaganda more closely. The main principle is to shift responsibility for anything that went wrong on other people's shoulders. Obviously, many things had gone wrong in Germany, therefore a scapegoat had to be found, a public enemy, responsible for all distress, a devil

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incarnate who was working deliberately for the ruin of the German people. These evildoers and their secret machinations must be exposed to public indignation and hatred—the natural consequence will be their annihilation. The Nazis are always trying to reveal some kind of conspiracy against the life of the nation before a shuddering audience. Such explanations appeal to the uninstructed; I am sure they appeal to the propagators themselves. Take the Jewish problem. Read what Hitler has to say in *Mein Kampf* about the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. There is a world-wide Jewish conspiracy working for the destruction of all mankind. That is what Hitler seems to believe. And in the end, so he comforts his readers, the ‘vampire’ will die too; there will be nothing left for the ‘parasite’ to live on. That is Hitler’s version of the Jewish problem. The message which this half-educated *praeceptor Germaniae* has to transmit to his nation is this: there are conspiracies all round! The ‘November criminals’, who engineered the revolution of 1918 (they were ‘pimps and deserters’ who prevented the German victory), the Communists, the Democrats and above all the Jew, who is the source of all evil! The German nation—so it was promised—will rise again if she discerns her foes and deals with them as they deserve. This might well be called a message of salvation; it was nothing less, it was accepted as such and acted upon. It is the Nazi Creed. This creed is now towering over Europe; it has achieved remarkable changes, and the danger is that success be taken as a token of its validity.

What is the nature of this creed? It is self-deception which lets loose torrents of hatred and indignation. The spirit of persecution is the core of the Nazi movement. Their home policy, their foreign policy, the war which they are waging now, it is all persecution.

It is wrong to believe that it needs intelligence and knowledge to understand the problems of Nazi Germany and to form an opinion about it. A most painstaking analysis does not really carry us further than the instinct of a simple uncorrupted man. The German problem is complicated; some efforts are needed to disentangle the various elements, but there is another perfectly legitimate approach. The Nazi movement has one conspicuous characteristic, undeniable and unmistakable—its cruelty. A man who is firmly convinced that cruelty is bad needs no further data to come to a verdict which is competent and well founded—he will reject and condemn a movement which fosters cruelty and

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indulges in its wicked delights. The evidence which is given in Irmgard Litten's book, *A Mother Fights Hitler*, is enough material; no further information is needed. But it is the prerogative of the uncorrupted mind, immune against sophistry, to take this simple and direct line of approach. The student of our present situation cannot leave things like that. The ascendancy of cruelty is a wider problem which deserves consideration. It is not difficult to prove that abominable deeds have been done in all centuries and ages. Yet there is one great difference and it is a test as well: Men may be cruel, yielding to their passions and hatred but ready to admit that they are doing wrong. On the other hand, men, perhaps even less cruel in actual fact, may feel that cruelty is not bad in itself but justified, and superior to pity and compassion. It is not until this reversal of moral standards has occurred that real danger is imminent and the ascendancy of cruelty begins. Such changes have not yet taken place on a large scale, but the ground has been prepared. We are witnessing a beginning. I restrict my investigations to Germany. Everybody will admit—for it is an historical fact and beyond debate—that there is only one source of European morality, the Christian religion. But many people will disapprove of the statement that the Christian religion is also the only guardian of European morality. For many attempts have been made, some by very powerful minds, to prove that the moral code which Christianity has developed can be based on foundations which do not derive their strength and validity from religious sanction. These philosophical endeavours were very marked in Germany, they coincided with the classical 'Weimar' literature. The influence of the philosophers on the educated classes was considerable and worked in the same direction as the Weimar tradition (see Chapter IV). The reaction against the French Revolution, the romantic movement, the fight against Napoleon and his downfall, brought about a Catholic revival, which was, however, on a small scale and affected only intellectual circles. The nineteenth century witnessed a steady advance of religious dissolution affecting the belief of the masses; but the traditional moral standards were taken for granted and firmly defended, even by the most progressive minds. Ludwig Feuerbach's influence reached beyond the narrow circle of the educated. In Keller's *Grüner Heinrich* we come across one of Feuerbach's disciples—a foolish man who feels so greatly relieved by the happy news that there is no God, that he exclaims again and again: 'What a joy to be alive!' and becomes rather a nuisance

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to his companions. In the second half of the century the anti-religious fervour of Karl Marx began to stir the working-classes, and here for the first time an attack was launched on a wider scale against traditional morality, or at least parts of it. Marx wrote: 'The social principles of Christianity preach cowardice, self-contempt, abasement, submission, humility, in a word, all the qualities of the *canaille*; and the proletariat, which will not allow itself to be treated as *canaille*, needs courage, self-confidence, pride, a sense of personal dignity and independence, even more than it needs daily bread. The social principles of Christianity are lickspittle, whereas the proletariat is revolutionary. So much for the social principles of Christianity.' Hatred became a virtue and a duty, a mental equipment indispensable for civil war. But Marx cannot be classified (in spite of all this) among the deliberate destroyers of Christian morality; he rather proclaimed a moratorium. There was moral indignation behind his fury, and he visualized the ultimate happiness of the people as a life of peace and concord; but the present intermediate stage, so he believed, has no use for these ideals, they must be shelved for the time being. But the opinions of men are not only affected by doctrines and books. Their own experience is a factor of greater importance still, for it makes them either responsive or immune. But is it possible to summarize the experience of a whole population? Of course not. All we can do is to single out the most important facts of the period which must have affected the lives of many; we cannot properly estimate the actual influence, its vigour and its secret work. The first fact I want to mention is the urbanization of Germany under Capitalist rule. Man's happiness cannot thrive in slums and suburbs. That there is still happiness under such conditions only does credit to the indomitable spirit and vitality of those who defy their surroundings by adapting themselves. Jacques Maritain remarked that 'the world will presently become uninhabitable for anybody but saints'. And A. E. Housman wrote:

. . . I see  
In many an eye that measures me  
The mortal sickness of a mind  
Too unhappy to be kind.  
Undone with misery, all they can  
Is to hate their fellow man;  
And till they drop they needs must still  
Look at you and wish you ill.

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Add to these evils which Capitalism bred the effects of Prussian education and its bitter fruit—callousness, and the picture will be complete. The deterioration, however, did not become apparent until the whole system of society was put to the test, the post-war crisis revealed the true state of affairs—spiritual resources were lacking. The war itself, not only the defeat, created an acid scepticism and profound disillusionment. The amoral outlook on life is, as a rule, confined to educated classes; leisure, boredom, and refinement seem to encourage it. The Great War and the gruesome tasks which it imposed upon men spread cynicism among the whole nation, particularly affecting the younger men. Battle-fields and trenches had been the formative experiences of their lives. For years they had looked out on to No-man's-land and had seen nothing but destruction. It is not surprising that many a youth exposed to such an experience should have become what Catiline was called, *contemptor divum*—a despiser of the gods. The young cynics cared little for their own life, less still for the lives of others. When they came home they found everything upside down and in a state of flux. They believed in nothing. Their venomous Nihilism, though inarticulate, was more extreme than the doctrines of the philosophers. The type of man I am referring to did not read books. 'Whenever I hear the word "culture" my finger tightens round the trigger,' wrote a young German author after the war.

Ernst Jünger, whose general importance and significance will be discussed in the next chapter, is one of these cynical soldiers. He is at the same time a man of culture and refinement. He is also a most accomplished author. One of his books is called *The Undaunted Heart*, which deserves careful study. It is a kind of diary, a very personal book in spite of the fact that it deals mostly with topics of a general philosophical and political nature. He also records dreams and visions. They are mostly satanic. I give one example:

### *The Abbey.*

We all stood together in an old abbey and were clothed in magnificent robes embroidered with red and gold. Amongst the assembled monks were some, and I was one of them, who adhered to a new faith. Our leader was still a young man, more splendidly clothed than anyone else. An eerie atmosphere pervaded the gothic hall into which streamed the multi-coloured rays of the sun and from whose altars glittered gems and metals. It was bitterly



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cold. Suddenly our leader was seized from behind and thrown on to a choir bench. Two gilded candles which spluttered as they burned and spread a stupefying scent were held before him. Then he was dragged, unconscious, on to an altar. A group of monks, with faces of such wickedness as is generally only seen in torturers of old altar-pieces, closed round and bare steel flashed. It was impossible to see what happened next; I only perceived with horror that the monks were drinking from chalices filled with a milky liquid on top of which floated a blood-flecked foam. It was all over quickly, the evil figures stepped back and the martyr rose. His expression made it clear that he did not know what had happened to him. His face had become old, sunken, bloodless and white as chalk. At his first step he fell lifeless to the ground. This event filled us with great horror.

Our general survey of the German situation leads us to the following conclusion: the ascendancy of cruelty has begun. The Nazis have incorporated it into their system of Government, though they still do not dare to proclaim it openly. They pay some lip-service to the ancient moral standards by calling the truth about their concentration camps atrocity stories. But Hitler has always preached persecution; he is himself an instigator of cruelty. The S.S. men who torture the defenceless are doing what he would call their duty. Such is his depravity.

Hitlerism claims to be a movement of regeneration. In actual fact the movement does not even know what regeneration is. Two points must not be missed:

1. The social and national disease which Hitler set out to cure was a real one.
2. His 'cure' was incompetent though it produced results. He is a prospering quack.

The second statement needs explanation. The Nazi 'cure' is incompetent because Nazi success is an intensification of decline. When Hitler began his political career he found a society around him that had come to realize its own instability. Most of the men he mustered were uprooted. As a saviour he entered suburbia which was stricken with panic. And what was the result of his labours? Suburbia gone mad. The German problem (and the European problem as well) is to stabilize state and society, to check the process of disintegration which has torn the masses away from the soil, to revive our ancient traditions. All this can be summed up in one sentence: Man must be given back his home.

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The magnitude of this task might well frighten and dishearten us. There are many clever people and sincere minds who would say that a restoration on that scale is impossible, that European civilization is past praying for. To debate this all-important point is outside the scope of this book. But one thing is certain. Whoever understands the nature of the problem will not be prepared to accept an incompetent solution, like a feeble-minded customer walking into a big store and falling into the hands of a persuasive attendant who makes him buy things which he really did not want at all.

Hitlerism is precipitating the deterioration of Germany. When the end of the régime has come, as we hope it will, the evils in German national life will be more marked and conspicuous than ever, not because the Nazi rulers have gone but because they have been there.

It seems unnecessary and futile to examine in detail the tenets of the so-called Nazi *Weltanschauung*. This philosophy of life is out of touch with any serious tradition of thought. The simple reason is that the promoters of Nazi 'philosophy' are half-educated men who never took the trouble to study anything carefully. It is perfectly clear whence Hitler derived his opinions—from the low stratum of anti-semitic journalism. A notorious periodical representative of this whole section of the press was called *The Hammer*. That magazine, edited by a certain Fritzsche, indulged in pseudo-scientific research about the Talmud and ritual murders. The deplorable level, the low caste character of this anti-semitic journalism is partly explained by the fact that the respectable German press tried to kill anti-semitism by ignoring its existence. After the Great War an unlimited freedom of expression prevailed in Germany. It was permissible to deride religion, to abuse the nation and the soldiers who had lost their lives in battle, to promulgate filthy literature and plays; it was not permissible to discuss the Jewish problem or even to maintain that it existed. Hitler monopolized this problem and he did it in his own way, as we all know. All this contains a lesson: if certain problems are left entirely to hole-and-corner journalism the moment might come when these problems are suddenly imposed upon public opinion not as problems but as solutions shaped and worked out by incompetent and fanatical minds. That is what happened in Germany. What is usually called the Nazi philosophy (the core of which is anti-Semitism) is not philosophy at all—it is trash.

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Hitler's own book and Rosenberg's *Myth of the Twentieth Century* fully prove that this is not an unfair verdict. Rosenberg's book is a crude version of H. S. Chamberlain's compilation, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*. It is all about the Aryan.

Behold, my child, the Nordic man  
And be as like him as you can.

(H. Belloc.)

But Chamberlain, whom William II called his 'companion in arms' and also his 'spiritual midwife', was at least a studious man, an omnivorous reader; Rosenberg is just a gas-bag. Hitler and his friends are quite convinced that the Nazi *Weltanschauung* is an adequate substitute for the ancient religion of Europe. They say so and they believe it. National Socialism has been set up as a counter-religion and has been widely accepted as such.

Dr. Ley, the leader of the German Labour Front, said in a speech at Kiel (1937): 'After three thousand years the teaching of Adolf Hitler will be as clear and unadulterated as to-day, it is the task of the Party organization to safeguard its purity. Every official has to live his life according to his precepts and ask himself before every action: "Would Adolf Hitler approve of this?" The word of the Führer must always be in all hearts.' And Baldur von Schirach, the leader of the Hitler Youth, defends the religious character of the movement with these words: 'When people assert that the Hitler Youth is a youth without religion and without God, then the Hitler Youth replies: "This service of ours for Germany is also a service of God! If the Hitler Youth loyally and bravely fulfils its duty to the people and is obedient to its Führer sent by God, then it is also acting in agreement with the Almighty." It is quite obvious that these self-confident prophets can only have a very scanty and superficial knowledge of the religious belief which has moulded our civilization. The same with Hitler. There is a very revealing passage in *Mein Kampf* where he mentions the fanaticism of Christianity. Hitler writes: "Christianity could not content itself in building up its own altars. It had to destroy the Pagan altars. Only out of this fanatic intolerance could the firm faith arise; this intolerance was its necessary basis." And then he draws the lesson: "A philosophy of life inspired by infernal intolerance can only be defeated by a new, true, and pure idea, urged on by this same spirit and defended with similar energy." There is only one side of Christianity that

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impresses Hitler: the fanaticism, the religious reign of terror, the persecution. According to this conception, the Spanish Inquisition should be regarded as the highest manifestation of the Christian faith. Far from realizing that religious persecutions are a sign of religious decay, Hitler believes that the sordid spirit of fanaticism and cruelty is the *source* of the Christian religion. But the Gospel story begins with the angelic praise: 'Peace on earth, goodwill towards men,' and with the adoration of the shepherds. Herod is not a witness of the Faith. The gist of the matter is this: Hitler is quite prepared to talk with marked self-confidence about the Christian religion, but he does not know what he is talking about. He has got—as politicians would say—no 'inside information'. But is that surprising? He is a citizen of suburbia and suburbia is practically everywhere out of touch with the traditions of our race, including the religious traditions. I should like to quote from a recent report on secondary education published by the English Board of Education. There we read: 'But it is also true that no boy or girl can be counted as properly educated unless he or she has been made aware of the fact of the existence of a religious interpretation of life.' And further on: 'There are others who would probably maintain that the primary purpose of teaching Scripture is to attach some significance to the idea of the Christian faith.' It is the tone that makes the music. These timid and hesitating words reveal the spirit of suburbia which is so effective an element in modern compulsory education. Counterfeit religions, like Hitlerism, can only succeed if the ground has been well prepared.

The question has often been asked: How was it possible that an old and civilized nation could accept so shallow and repulsive a creed? The sinister ecstasies of hatred, the vile adoration of the Führer, the shameless self-exaltation which permeates the Nazi community, the flattery of the young—how could all this be accepted and indulged in?

The question is often asked by Christians in other European countries, and their dismay about Nazi wickedness is sometimes sweetened by the feeling, 'Thanks be to God, we are very different people'. But the German problem cannot be grasped properly if it be approached in the spirit of self-righteousness. It seems, therefore, better to ask: what forces could have withstood the Nazi Movement? What kind of resources could a man fall back upon in order to resist a stirring gospel of self-deception that gave him hope in times of general despair when all his security had

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gone? I think there is no force that could have supplied the necessary power of resistance except a living religion. Is Germany, therefore, no longer a Christian nation? There has been a great readiness to accept this thesis and there is much to be said for it. But whatever our final verdict may be, whether we call Germany Christian or Pagan, we must realize that the Germans are—broadly speaking—no less Christian than the other European nations. Perhaps there has been a greater readiness in Germany to abandon stagnant religious traditions. The German outlook is always dangerously subjective. Sincerity counts more than truth. It is also true that no other country has produced anything that could be compared with Nietzsche's philosophy and its anti-Christian fury (see Chapter X). The main difference, however, between Germany and the rest of Europe is this: In Germany, Christianity has been put to the test and on the large scale it has failed, for Hitler came to power supported by a mass movement. In other countries (leaving Russia out of the question) Christianity has not yet been tested. But who would dare to say confidently that the Christian churches elsewhere would become the rallying point of resistance should the traditional standards be challenged in an unexpected and formidable way? It must also be remembered that the one uncompromising opposition which the Hitler régime has found so far, after it had established itself, was the Christian opposition. The name of Pastor Niemöller is known all over the world, but it is often forgotten that there are many other Germans (how many we do not know) who are suffering in Nazi concentration camps for their belief in Christ. German Christianity was not strong enough to stem the tide (many shepherds were fast asleep or, worse still, chatting in a friendly way with the wolf), but it was not feeble enough to submit to the conqueror. All the powers of the world capitulated, the army, the judges, the high officials, the universities. They swallowed their self-respect and said 'Heil Hitler'!

Nazism, based on self-deception and hatred, has found allies even more formidable than itself. They are Prussia and the Philosophy of Nihilism. The suburban Hitler movement had originally not much in common with Prussia. There were, of course, some links, for Prussia had permeated the whole German life. The Party, with its storm troops, etc., developed a semi-military organization—that appealed to many Germans. Conscripted bore fruit. Without Prussia's corrupting training it would have been impossible for normal men to feel elevation and pride

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if only they were allowed to march in formation carrying walking-sticks like rifles. An expression of stupid satisfaction could be seen on the faces of Hitler's 'Brown Shirts' when they were marching through the streets. I have rejected the assertion in a former chapter that Germany has no tradition left except her army; but for some people it was really true—the Prussian Army and its routine was the centre of their lives, their brightest memory. They did not long for war, they disliked its anarchy, but they loved the Prussian drill. These enthusiasts were nearly always very stupid. There is a German saying:

Nur die allerdümmsten Kälber  
wählen ihren Metzger selber.

(Only very stupid calves choose their own butcher.)

It is, by the way, quite wrong to believe that the Prussian system needs the support of a warlike population. This has been said over and over again. German literature has been searched laboriously for suitable quotations and even Tacitus' description of the Teutonic tribes was offered without hesitation as an analysis of the present German mind. But the most sturdy supporter of Prussia is the simpleton, the man who is impressed and elevated by his experiences on the parade ground. A man of that kind is not longing for battle. He wants to obey and to give some orders himself if that be granted to him. It is the routine of the barracks that he enjoys. There was, however, another type—the cynic warrior, the Catiline type. These men were, as we have seen, the product of the Great War—soldiers who could not find the way back to normal life. They filled the ranks of the Nazi party. There were many of them in Germany after the war, disgruntled, impoverished, ready to blow up the whole structure of *bourgeois* society. Their hero was Captain Ehrhard, who had fought in the Baltic provinces and had taken part in the unsuccessful *coup d'état* of Kapp in 1920. He was the first to make his men paint the swastika on their steel helmets. Captain Roehm, an even more disreputable adventurer than Ehrhard, actually 'discovered' Hitler. He thought he had found a useful fellow who could make thundering speeches. Very soon, however, the demagogue overshadowed the perverted soldier and became his master, in the end his executioner. Roehm was one of the victims of the 30th of June 1934. General Ludendorff was prepared to co-operate with Hitler and accepted the elevated post of German Regent and Commander-in-Chief of the Germany Army when

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Hitler attempted his *coup d'état* in November 1923. The General risked his life for the movement; he just escaped death when he marched, together with Hitler, at the head of a Nazi demonstration through the streets of Munich. But Ludendorff had become very eccentric after the war, he was the head of a neo-pagan sect—that was not quite in keeping with Prussian style. The typical Prussian must have considered the Nazi movement slightly repugnant. Prussians dislike the frenzies of a crowd. They prefer to see the sons of the nation put into uniform and drilled in the regular army. Furthermore, the spirit of persecution is not an element of the Prussian mind; Prussia has many vices but she is free from that stain. There was, therefore, a definite lack of sympathy, clearly expressed in Hindenburg's attitude of contempt. He called Hitler a 'drummer' and treated him, in August 1932, with complete lack of courtesy. It must have taken Herr von Papen a good deal of time and trouble to overcome the healthy reluctance of the old Marshal. But Hitler was determined to identify his movement with the Prussian tradition. The Day of Potsdam, the great State ceremony in March 1933, four weeks after the Reichstag fire, was presumably mainly eyewash for Hindenburg, but it was also meant to be some kind of symbol, a message to the army and to the nation.

The setting was well chosen. When the old soldier was standing at the tomb of Frederick the Great, all the glittering trophies of Prussia around him, Hitler at his side, dumb with respect (so it seemed), he certainly must have formed a very wrong picture of the actual political situation in his ageing mind. Hitler knew perfectly well that Hindenburg had to be deceived, he had to be kept uninformed. Nazi cruelty in concentration camps was already in full swing; Hindenburg was the only man in Germany who could have deposed Hitler; the army would have been on his side. It was certainly not an easy task for Hitler to gain Prussia's support. Many hesitations and misgivings had to be overcome. But in the end he succeeded. The demagogue knew what he wanted and the attitude of the army (which is Prussia) was wavering and feeble. The murder of General von Schleicher, on the 30th of June, made none of his fellow-officers stir, there was only a slight gesture of disapproval—I think this was the turning-point, it was Prussia's capitulation before the Nazi movement. The army decided to obey. And after all, why not? The generals got what they had hardly dared to dream of—a rearmament programme on a colossal scale. That meant business. Politics

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(including concentration camps) could be safely entrusted to Adolf Hitler's care.

Hitler's success completed Prussia's surrender. His rise to power, the firm establishment of the régime, his brazen foreign policy, all this must have fascinated the Prussian mind. Prussia adores success. She falters in defeat and breaks off battles (like the Battle of the Marne in 1914). God, so Prussians believe, is always with the stronger battalions. The victories of the war, the Napoleonic position which Hitler now holds clinched the matter. The 'drummer' has been incorporated into the Prussian legend; he is another Fridericus Rex. The fuming demagogue—who in 1932 sent a telegram of appreciation and praise to the Potempa murderers, five S.A. men who had trampled a Communist to death in front of his mother—is now accepted as the 'Führer' and Commander-in-Chief of the Prussian Army and as a symbol of its loftiest ideals.

This whole development is a decisive success from Hitler's point of view. The suburban creed of self-deception and persecution is now closely linked up with the Prussian tradition and benefits from Prussia's glory. Prussia herself, as we have seen, is a power of disintegration. But she has roots, she is an historical reality. She has, compared with Nazism, a certain dignity. And there is a practical side as well. The military traditions of Prussia, her organizing power, her skill in arms, are now at Hitler's disposal. He did not fail to make use of this formidable instrument.

In order to estimate the inner strength of Nazi Germany, we must remember three facts. First, the final success of the Hitler movement in January 1933 was achieved by intrigue. Herr von Papen smuggled Hitler into the Chancellery of the Reich. He believed that the Nazis would provide the necessary popular support which his own Cabinet was so badly lacking. There had been a real chance of stemming the tide. Hitler's ascendancy was not written in the stars. The Potempa incident, in Autumn 1932, might have become a turning point in German history if the gallant public protest which Dr. Paul Rohrbach made in his pamphlet, *Chancellor Papen, Dissolve the Reichstag*, had found a wider response and if it had not been Herr von Papen on whom Rohrbach's hopes relied. Secondly, Nazi Germany is a country where mass conversions have taken place. This very fact means weakness, at least vulnerability. History and human experience as well teach us that loyalties derive their strength from the fact that they are never



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exposed to doubt, they are beyond debate. That is why loyalties are the firmer the more traditional they are, handed down to the individual, taken for granted, not examined and deliberately chosen. A new allegiance based on the individual's choice need not necessarily be weak, but as a rule it is weaker and more vulnerable than traditional loyalty. It is only through the medium of Prussia that the Nazis have managed to establish some real contact with older German traditions; their movement as such lacks roots. Thirdly, the victory of the Nazis was by no means complete after they had come into power. Those who disapproved of the movement and who had still power and influence did not put up sufficient resistance. Everybody in Germany who witnessed the events of 1933-34 will remember this display of weakness and timidity, particularly in higher quarters. There was a type of German patriot ready to lend his support to any government that poured forth the familiar nationalist verbiage. The patriotic jargon of the Bismarck Reich and power behind it—that was for many people enough to make a régime legitimate. They closed their eyes before the cruelties of their new rulers; they obeyed and hoped for the best. The days of Stein had passed when even Prussian Generals acted like citizens. To exploit and to intensify the emotional insincerity of German nationalism was not a hard task for Hitler. If men pretend to feel what they really do not feel, if they are lost in a maze of self-deception, they can be easily taken by the nose and led anywhere. The Nazi demagogue had only to flavour his so-called programme with patriotic idealism, like a cook who spices bad meat. The patriot brought up under Bismarck 'traditions' would take to it. This is not gullibility due to lack of intelligence, it is a sign of that corruption which Crown Prince Frederick deplored (Chapter VI), and which is typical of the Reich. No confidence should be placed in men who have imbibed the spirit of the Bismarck era and who identify Germany with the Bismarck state! There is yet another group of Nazi followers which has to be considered. It is possible that there are even nowadays many people in Germany who are quite oblivious of the fact that the Nazis have made cruelty and murder a method of government. Such greenhorns may exist, though it is difficult to believe. Neither the greenhorn nor the patriotic condoner will be of much use in breaking up the so-called unity of the Nazi state. They lack the intelligence and strength of character which are necessary for deliberate political action. But they will be an element of decomposition when real danger begins to overshadow

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the Reich. One thing is certain: a solid, well-founded national unity does not exist in Nazi Germany. We come to the end.

The Nazi Movement contributes nothing to the regeneration of German national life. On the contrary, incapable of grasping the nature of the problem, the Nazis have increased the calamities which Prince Max von Baden so sincerely deplored. The spirit of civil war still reigns in Germany, the State itself represents it. The murderers of Dollfuss are worshipped as national heroes; pogroms are encouraged and organized, justice has ceased, or at least its machinery and proceedings can be interfered with whenever the State wills. At the trial of the Reichstag fire, Goering, then Prime Minister of Prussia, lost his temper and shouted at one of the prisoners: 'You wait till I get you outside.' That is the way Nazis look upon justice. One might truly say that none of the evils which Prince Max pointed out have disappeared; they have been intensified, sanctioned and brought into a system. Behind the façade of discipline and order the process of deterioration goes on with greater vehemence. It is not astonishing, it is quite natural that the 'Führer' should have forced his way into the Prussian camp. He was drawn there by instinct. To cling to Prussia with all his might seemed to this apostate Austrian right and also safe. The success of the Prussian war machine is presumably the only fact in German history which he really understands. To increase this military power on a scale hitherto unknown was therefore his practical programme for Germany's salvation. Was there ever a greater folly? The average German, misled and deceived (not without his own fault), the mothers and sisters now anxiously awaiting news from the battle zone—they all have every reason to exclaim:

'We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble!'

## OPEN REBELLION AGAINST TRADITION: THE PHILOSOPHY OF NIHILISM

IT is a useless enterprise to try to discover the source of Nazi ideas and to trace them back through the centuries. Nazi ideas are Hitler's ideas and they proceed from the quagmire of the anti-Semitic press. As Nietzsche said: 'The man who angles where there are no fish, I call him not even superficial' (*Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Part III.) The intellectual side of Nazism is irrelevant and allows no further analysis; it is the emotional side that matters. This lack of doctrine is of course a great weakness of the movement because clear thought gives a revolution push and power. Human will cannot act properly and grow up into tenacity if there is nothing more than a welter of inordinate passions and a confused mind. But Nazi Germany is not without real intellectual force. This force, however, is not a Nazi product; it proceeds from quite a different source; I have called it the Philosophy of Nihilism.

The philosophy of Nihilism is not limited to one country, it is a European affair. It developed during the nineteenth century and is more a philosophical temperament than a doctrine. This philosophy draws its inspirations from signs of decline. The general tone and spirit is: we are doomed. There has always been a good deal of lament about decline and decay throughout the centuries. We cannot find a single period in history when such bitter complaints were not made. Epochs which we consider now to have been full of life and vigour were classified by many contemporaries as periods of decline. But with the nineteenth century this well-known pessimism assumes a new and more sombre tinge. This is not surprising. The reasons have been discussed in the fifth chapter. The intellectual force and power of conviction which the philosophy of Nihilism has at its disposal is explained by one simple fact: there is truth in it. The gloomy analysis is not the product of disgruntled minds, nor is it the feeble reaction of men who shrink back from reality and find escape in praising the past. We hear a good deal about 'escape' and 'escapists' nowadays. The term is used by many people like a steamroller to crush the arguments of their opponents. But, as I said before, mere words should not frighten us. To stress the superiority of the past need not be a sign of feebleness. Nor does it indicate unreadiness.

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ness to act. On the contrary, it is better to respect our forefathers than to worship the child of the future. Men who set themselves the task to be not entirely unworthy of past generations have usually achieved more than those who believed the best was still to come.

The pessimistic analysis of our present situation is, however, not the core of Nihilism; it is nothing more than its basis. Only philosophers who accept the general deterioration as a positive event, that ought to be welcomed, can be called proper Nihilists. Such men exist and there was a genius amongst them: Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

This is not the place where Nietzsche's philosophy and its many aspects can be discussed. It is a hard task, perhaps an impossible one, to give the gist of his thoughts. Many interpretations are possible and have been presented. This fact gives us the clue to Nietzsche's problematic mind; he longed for response and suffered intensely from his loneliness. He wrote in order to challenge and to force the stupid and self-complacent spirit of his time to react, be it even in a hostile way. Therefore he assumes many roles, many different postures. Nietzsche is the master fencer among philosophers, who as a rule are of a calmer and more meditative temperament, and ought to be. Nietzsche despised sedentary habits. He himself was a keen walker and would roam about the countryside, along the hills of the Engadine, like the ancient priests of Dionysus, the orgiastic god, whose worshipper he claimed to be. He never contemplated the world as a whole, he was always on the warpath and pursued his problems like a hunter. Hence the feverish rhythm, the impetuous drive of his philosophy. All this is clearly expressed in his style. He preferred to write aphorisms, for he liked to throw a sudden flashlight on a problem and to state his case in a brilliant, challenging way and then to leave it like that. Nietzsche's prose is electric. It has a stirring quality which gives his writings a foreign character, for the great German prose is always marked by its quiet flow. John Cowper Powys wrote:

'His thoughts affect us as if they were the burning tunes for which armies have perished and cities have been sacked.'

This is true; the cities are ablaze now and the armies are marching.

Nietzsche's analysis of our present situation is very acute. His most important works were written after 1880. Prussia had

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triumphed, the Bismarck Reich was firmly established, the industrial expansion of Germany in full swing. Nietzsche disregarded all these events. His thesis was that European civilization was entirely unstable and hollow, practically on the verge of breaking down. More than that—he believed it deserved to break down. And why? Because sincerity had gone; the highest values had lost their meaning, nobody then really believed in them. The honest people admit it, the others don't. The *Will to Power* contains the following passage: 'What I am telling is the story of the next two centuries. I am describing what is going to happen, what will happen inevitably: the ascendancy of nihilism. This story can already be told now, for necessity is at work. The future reveals itself in hundreds of symptoms. . . . Our whole European civilization moves with an intensity that is steadily increasing towards some kind of catastrophe: restlessly, violently, impetuously, like a river that wants to reach its end. . . . The author of this book looks back when he tells what is going to happen. He is the first radical nihilist of Europe, but he has overcome nihilism within himself—it is behind him, below him, outside him.'

What does this mean? How can Nietzsche claim that he has overcome Nihilism? The European values and standards which are now melting away are, according to Nietzsche, in themselves wrong and invalid. The present deadly crisis has come about because these values have created decadence—they represent it. Christianity is the culprit. The centre of Nietzsche's work is his attack on the Christian religion. He called himself proudly the Anti-Christ; the violence of his attack is unsurpassed. Before Nietzsche's condemnations the critical attempts of rationalists and freethinkers pale into nothingness. But the actual substance of his anti-Christian philosophy is poor. His impetuous style, the many brilliant ideas which he pours forth, his psychological insight—all this cannot conceal the fact that his main tenets when translated into plain and simple words are often amazingly meagre, even puerile. His thoughts intoxicate, but that in itself is not a token of truth. He himself, however, was convinced that he was exposing the error of centuries and he realized that it was not one of the minor jobs to replace Christianity. Nietzsche's claims, though they sound like the ravings of a madman, are the perfectly natural consequence of his anti-Christian doctrine. More than that: his was one of the greatest illusions that has ever obsessed a man's mind, he was not the saviour of mankind, but the wild

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remarks which he made about himself and his influence contain some truth—he is a destroyer of first magnitude. Listen to this :

‘I know my fate. My name will be linked up with something tremendous, with a crisis as never has been before on earth, with the hardest conflict of consciences, with a challenge thrown out to everything that has been believed, demanded and respected hitherto. I am no man, I am dynamite. I am no religious founder—religions are the affairs of the rabble. I do not want ‘faithful’ followers, I never talk to masses . . . my fate wills that I am the first honest man who opposes the hypocrisy of centuries, therefore I am certainly the man of destiny. For if truth goes into action against the lies of centuries we shall have an earthquake as it has never been dreamed of before. Politics will dissolve into a war of the spirit, all institutions of the old society will be blown sky high—they are all based on lies. There will be wars such as the world has not yet seen. Great politics on earth start with me.’

Nietzsche’s philosophy can teach a lesson, which it was certainly not his intention to transmit—sincere apostasy does not recover the health and sanity of pre-Christian paganism, as so many people have thought; it leads into a welter of confusion and decay. Dostoevsky clearly perceived this at a time when there was not much readiness to believe him. He maintained that the well-behaved atheism of the *bourgeois* world would lead eventually to quite different manifestations; the house, he thought, is getting ready, ‘swept and garnished’ so that the demons may enter and ‘the last state of man is worse than the first’. This idea underlies Dostoevsky’s great novels. Many people are inclined to consider such opinions fantastic, unrelated to reality, for the breaking away from Christianity seems to be rather a gradual and gentle process. The Weimar tradition, as we have seen, detached itself from our ancient religion but this was done in a very inconspicuous way. There was no violent rupture, there was on the whole no open defiance: the classical poets laid Christianity aside like a reader who shuts a book which does not appeal to him. Similar developments have occurred in other countries. Therefore it seems that the post-Christian stage of European civilization can be reached without exposing ourselves to any shocks or convulsions; the whole thing looks more like a perfectly natural growth; a gradual development proceeding smoothly. This interpretation, I think, is wrong. The facts, however, are undeniable—the gentle form of apostasy exists; more than that, it is the rule. How then can this be explained? The answer is: Men drifting

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away from Christianity do not give up at once the whole body of Christian tradition, they still cling to many of its elements, and the fragments and remnants which are thus preserved make it possible to carry on without experiencing the sensations of a sudden change. Tradition lingers on but not indefinitely. All religions have a core, a centre. This centre is their doctrine. From this proceeds the full flow of religious influence affecting gradually all spheres of life and giving shape and character to a whole civilization. Once the central doctrines are discarded the original source of inspiration, which has so far invigorated the whole complexity of human life, is abandoned too. Therefore the products of this religion, cut off from their roots, are bound to fade, to lose their strength and original meaning or to become the prey of new forces which set out to capture and to transform them. All this is deterioration, but it need not be realized as such and it can certainly be very slow. It has often been said that modern Europe has already entered the post-Christian stage. Christians have said it with distress and alarm, and non-Christians with approval or indifference. It is not necessary to survey the many symptoms and facts that can be mustered to support this verdict. They are well known. But it seems to me an impossible task to estimate the true life of modern Christianity. The reason is—the life of religion is mostly hidden. Even if the actual manifestations are deplorable and unconvincing, we are not entitled to conclude that the end has come. It has been said so many times. The currents of Christian life escape calculation. Analysis must fail because the data are not within reach. Luther wrote in his *De servo arbitrio*: 'My dear Erasmus, the Church of God is in actual fact not quite as common as her name. The Church is hidden, the saints are unknown. Since the beginning of the world the Church of God has always been in this position: some were called God's people and saintly men, the others, only few in numbers, were God's people without being called so.' The 'hidden Church', however, gives no guarantee that Christian civilization will survive; all she gives is some hope. The fundamental fact remains unshaken and unaltered—Europe breaking away from its ancient religion must sooner or later reach the stage when the last remnants of Christian tradition will disappear. Nietzsche's philosophy is a deliberate attempt to accelerate this process. It despises gentle apostasy which drifts away comfortably and smoothly. Nietzsche tried to push ahead. But by renouncing Christ he did not find Dionysus; he was like Samson who pulled

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down the pillars on which the house rested and 'the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people that were therein.'

It is impossible, however, fully to understand what went on in the depth of Nietzsche's bold and noble mind. The Italian landlord and his family with whom he stayed for some time used to refer to him as 'il piccolo santo'. That was the impression which Nietzsche's gentle personality made on those simple people. And another incident is worth recalling. When Nietzsche's mind broke down in 1889 it was the sight of an old horse cruelly beaten by his owner in the streets of Turin that caused his collapse: the philosopher of ruthlessness flung his arms round the wretched animal's neck and wept. Lastly, this was the message which the mad genius sent to his friend, the composer Gast: 'Sing me a new song. The world is transfigured and all the heavens rejoice.' He signed 'The Crucified'.

There can be no peace and compromise between Nietzsche and Christianity. But Christians do well to remember the passage from The Revelation:

'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.'

Nietzsche's influence upon the younger generation can hardly be overestimated—it was profound. Where his mind ruled, the remnants of the Christian faith went. The Weimar tradition had nourished a well-behaved indifference towards religion; Nietzsche's philosophy was an open declaration of war. At the beginning of the twentieth century the vast majority of educated people (at least in Protestant Germany) were quite out of touch with the Church and any of her activities. Children were still baptized and confirmed, but confirmation classes and the ceremony itself had become a most awkward and odd experience for many, a humiliating affair, no longer compatible with true sincerity. It honours the younger generation that they felt a strong revulsion against keeping up a mere show. Modernist parsons who now and then posed as courageous champions for intellectual freedom because they quarrelled with an orthodoxy which had become powerless and insignificant, made no impression—Gottfried Keller has given an excellent and amusing description of this type in his story, *Lost Laughter*. The ground was well prepared for Nietzsche's anti-Christian doctrine. It is certain that the German situation was in many ways different from the English. A German public-



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school boy would never have brought a Bible from home and put it on his desk or—worse still—beside his bed; public opinion would have considered it extremely queer and unseemly except in schools run by religious communities.

During the Great War *Zarathustra* was read in dug-outs and trenches. For many young people it was a book of devotion. In post-war Germany Nietzsche's influence seemed to recede. But in actual fact his philosophy had been absorbed and its virulence was now working in other creative minds. This brings us to an important set of authors, the 'Widerstand' group. They are the real Nihilists.

The 'Widerstand' was a political magazine founded after the war. It never had a very wide circulation, but its influence was nevertheless considerable. The main idea propagated by this magazine was the war of liberation to be fought against the powers of Versailles. A German alliance with Soviet Russia was therefore considered essential. To organize Russia's potential military strength and to combine it with the power of Prussia had indeed been the dream of many German militarists. The German-Russian alliance was considered the corner-stone of Bismarck's foreign policy; when Emperor William I died in 1888 his last words were said to have been: 'Keep peace with Russia—there should never be a war.' But apart from these purely military considerations there were other reasons which urged the Nihilists on and strengthened their sympathies with the Soviets. Communism (more than anything else so far, except Capitalism) is grinding the traditions of the past to powder—that is a great achievement from the Nihilist point of view and evokes their genuine admiration.

The emblem of the 'Widerstand' was the Prussian eagle with hammer and sickle. The editor, Ernst Niekisch, had been a Social Democrat, but he broke away from the party because he violently disapproved of the foreign policy which the Social Democrats supported after the war. The two most distinguished writers who contributed to this political magazine were two brothers, Ernst Jünger and Georg Friedrich Jünger. Both had been excellent soldiers in the last war, they were by no means representative of the intelligentsia. One was a good poet, the other a philosopher of the dangerous Nietzsche brand that likes to play about with spiritual high explosives. Ernst Jünger's mind moves about like a ghost or a demon in a city of destruction. When the Nazis came to power the periodical was suppressed and

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the editor imprisoned because of his pro-Russian policy, but I am sure that was not the end of it. Rauschnig, who has more inside information about the present state of affairs in Germany than I can claim, very much emphasizes the influence of the Widerstand group in the German Army among the younger officers and also in the Nazi Party among its more intelligent members. He considers this influence to be the real menace. I agree.

Niekisch and his friends showed no moral indignation about the Treaty of Versailles. They accepted 'Vae victis' as an eternal law of politics. Ready to inflict a harsh treaty themselves if given the chance, they did not think that the victor was in honour bound to become the nurse of the defeated. They resented help from the former enemy. They wanted no reconciliation. Therefore they poured derision and scorn on all those who believed in European co-operation and the League of Nations. Nothing would have been more distasteful to this group than successful co-operation between Germany and the Allies, leading up to a revision of the Versailles Treaty. This attitude was the logical outcome of the philosophy of history which stands behind it. Europe was doomed—that was the main thesis. The great era which began with Charlemagne is now coming to its close, the collapse of Europe and all its traditions is inevitable; we are already right in the middle of the portentous event. The intellectual level of the 'Widerstand' was high; one finds there good examples of a really penetrating analysis. But what strikes the reader most is the obvious glee with which these authors pronounced their final verdict: *moribundus*. Clemenceau in his book of self-defence has tried to prove that the Germans are always morbidly attracted by death and decay. All such generalizations are wrong if they are dogmatically formulated. The most characteristic manifestations of the German mind, the works of Stifter, of Eichendorff, Hölderlin, Mörike, the brothers Grimm, Keller, the Weimar tradition, Cărossa, do not fit into this picture. But, nevertheless, Clemenceau's remarks are not entirely unfounded. There is an apocalyptic element in the German imagination. If kept in check there is nothing evil or morbid in it. We might just as well blame our whole Christian tradition and reprimand Christ for having indulged in unpleasant imaginings about the end of the world. The conditions in post-war Germany, the actual experiences of every-day life, certainly encouraged sombre tendencies of thought and imagination. The flood was drawing near and the cellars were already full of water. The great response which

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Oswald Spengler's book, *The Decline of the West* (*Untergang des Abendlandes* is really a much more impressive title), found has something to do with the apocalyptic temperament of the German nation. The book makes stiff reading, but there are many oases where the weary traveller may rest and enjoy the prophecies of doom—like soft music. Spengler appealed to the imagination. He enchanted. The same can be said about the Nihilists of the 'Widerstand' group. There is an element of poetry even in their most Satanic visions and in their coldest analysis. It can best be described by quoting a line from a poem of Georg Trakl, an Austrian poet who died in 1914: 'Zur Vesper' verliert sich der Fremdling in schwarzer Novemberzerstörung.' ('Towards evening the stranger is lost in the bleak destruction of November.') The 'bleak destruction of November' and its peculiar imaginative spell inspires the Nihilists. Without catching at least a flair of this macabre poetry the strong appeal of these authors will hardly be understood.

Let us go on to examine the actual Nihilist tenets. Europe is tottering, so they believe. There is a passage in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*: 'Oh, my brethren, am I then cruel? But I say: all that is tumbling ought to be pushed. Everything to-day is falling and tottering—who would wish to support it? But I—I will give it a push! I am a forerunner only of better players, an example! Act accordingly!' The Nihilists hold that it is Prussia's mission to give Europe the necessary push and to bring about its destruction. They choose Prussia because they are impressed by her military efficiency and because they are well aware that Prussia is already, to a large extent, freed from the fetters of tradition and therefore particularly suitable for the task allotted to her. This task of destruction is not conceived as a purely military struggle, it is spiritual as well. All Western influence must be rejected, the last bonds that still unite Prussia with Europe have to be broken like chains; the Christian religion, already dead, must be cast away. Thus Prussia-Germany will regain her creative power and become the true antagonist of Europe.

It will be noted that this weird and perverted philosophy has some connexion with the Prussian legend which we discussed in the third chapter: the memory of Frederick the Great who defied Europe. But it must be understood that the Nihilist idea of Prussia's mission is not Prussian in itself. I think there must be great reluctance among the true representatives of the Prussian system, the officers of the Army, to accept so odd an idea, which

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they might even find hard to understand. Hindenburg would certainly have rejected it as a folly. But he was over eighty when he died in 1934. The Prussian tradition, in spite of its great atheist king, always included some kind of Christian element—an army religion very crude but respectable. This, of course, would have to go if Prussia really assumed her new historical role. Is it likely that the reluctance of the more conservative Prussian officers will be very strong and effective? After all, the Nihilist ideology flatters their pride. Excessive pride is Prussian.

It is not only Prussia on whom the hopes of the Nihilists rely, it is modern industry as well. They care little whether the industrial organization be based on Capitalist or Communist lines. They despise the *bourgeois*. All they want is industrial power fully developed and competently mastered. Economic planning on a large imperialistic scale is their ideal. Modern machinery and its irresistible advance fills these men with mystic frenzy. Karl Marx's praise of modern productive power (see Chapter V) sounds feeble and uninspired compared with the much more fervent Nihilist approval. Contrary to Karl Marx, the Nihilists realize the dangerous and destructive element in this process, but that is why they approve of it. An utterly dehumanized society is a vision that appeals to them. Large indeed is the gulf between Nietzsche and his ardent disciples! I give two quotations:

Ernst Niekisch:

The machine is nature subdued and tamed. . . . Man is the master, he turns a switch—that is the crack of the whip which brings the wild beast to heel. Eventually Man curbs his own incalculable nature, he adopts a discipline which transforms him into a machine himself. . . . The universal machinery to which Man contributes his own energy is Man's design, it is entirely of 'this world'. It is the achievement of which Man is capable if he relies entirely on himself, no longer on God or some supernatural order. . . . Economic success is still a mixture of human competence and God's blessing, but the efficiency of technique is a purely human affair—God is no longer needed.

Ernst Jünger:

In Kubin's remarkable novel, *The Other Side*, in which the profound horror of dreams finds expression, I came across the idea that a metropolitan café sometimes gives a Satanic impression. It is strange that this feeling seems to be so rare, even in places where modern technique displays itself without restraint. The fascinating glowing reds and icy blues of the electric signs, a modern bar, an American grotesque film—all these things are

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symptoms of a mighty Satanic rebellion, the sight of which fills the lonely observer with ecstasy and depressing fear as well. . . . This confirms me in my conviction that we must not try and retard modern civilization; on the contrary, this process should be accelerated. In any case the development is irresistible to such a degree that it can only be watched with deep satisfaction as it is always pleasing to see life exposed to strange and dangerous situations. But how we shall ever be able to escape this present impasse unscathed—well that is a problem indeed!

What was the attitude of the 'Widerstand' Nihilists towards the Nazi Movement? They rather despised it. They called it a lower middle-class affair, full of resentment, lacking the broad political vision which leads on to world-wide imperialistic policy. The Nazi 'Weltanschauung' they did not take seriously, it was never discussed at all. The baseness of Nazi persecution disgusted some of them. So did Nazi oratory. Georg Friedrich Jünger has written a poem against the Nazis, without mentioning their name. It was published in 1934 and must have escaped the censor's eye. But we should not make too much of such signs of revulsion and disapproval. The philosophy of Nihilism is cruel itself, though not base and vulgar. Ernst Jünger's books display the most intense cruelty, all the more repugnant as it goes together with aesthetic refinement. Niekisch appreciates the Nazi Movement because of its uprooting effect. 'National Socialism', he wrote in 1933, 'achieved its miraculous success by exposing the German people without hesitation to such methods of propaganda and discipline as are always successful with uprooted men. . . . The revolutionary event thus brought about was the destruction of the German national consciousness which was replaced by the modern crowd consciousness. A nation in despair found refuge in fanatic self-confidence (as all crowds do); it gave itself up as a nation in order to be reborn as a crowd in the National Socialist Movement.'

Generally speaking, it seems fair to say that there was only one real objection which the Nihilists made: they doubted the competence of the Nazis. By now these fears have been removed. Things turned out differently from what the 'Widerstand' group expected: Nazi imperialism has risen to full power; there should be no further reason for complaint and distrust. Nor will there be: this present war is what the Nihilists wanted. They can put their sinister soul and all their demoniac energy into it.

Chesterton once called Nietzsche the Prussian philosopher. He

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was nothing of the kind. Prussia and what it stands for lies quite outside the scope of Nietzsche's interest and philosophy, though modern German interpreters like Bäumler take pains to prove the contrary. But men like Niekisch and Jünger are the link between Nietzsche and Prussia. The philosophy of Nihilism is nothing without Nietzsche's powerful mind and spiritual force. He is the head. He is the dynamite (as he himself said) which is now at the disposal of unscrupulous men who want to destroy the battered civilization of Europe. The evil secret of this philosophy is suicide. That gives the clue. By destroying Europe these men destroy themselves. They invoke death.

To sum up: Three different forces have joined together and constitute Nazi Germany: Hitler's suburban movement, Prussia, and the Philosophy of Nihilism. Industrialism with its instability and intrinsic weakness provided the setting. Considering the results of our various investigations we must conclude: Germany's deterioration is proceeding rapidly. For all three forces just mentioned are destructive, they dissolve traditions, they uproot. Never before in German history has there been so powerful a combination working for decline. Germany's peril is great indeed. The triumph of Prussia in 1870 was a harmless affair compared with the present situation. We cannot pierce through the veil of power and temporary success. We cannot estimate the amount of healthy life that is still left unimpaired. To discuss the future and future possibilities lies outside the scope of this book. All we can say is this: the defeat of Hitlerism, of Prussia and her perverted apologists will have to be complete and final before the regeneration of Germany can be hoped for. It is not only the Nazi success in January 1933 which must be undone, the triumph of Prussia in 1866 and 1871 must be undone too. Will the Prussian legend, which now incorporates the 'Führer' ever be outshone by a brighter vision? For the problem will not be solved if only the 'Führer' and his creed be dropped and the legend as such retained. Will the national memory of Germany be strong and lively enough to overcome the deadly weight of Prussian traditions? Will the fearful incapacities of suburbia be checked? Will Germany, labouring for her integrity and restoration, find the support of her fellow nations, at least no hostility? Our investigation leads up to these questions but it does not, and cannot, attempt to answer them. The future is hidden. Nor is it necessary to know the future in order to come to the right decision which the present situation demands. What we must know is the reality which confronts us

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now. Such knowledge is indeed indispensable. If reality is misinterpreted or falsified, actions are bound to be wrong. The dangers proceeding from misconceptions are therefore practical and grave.

What I have tried to do is to tell the story of Germany's decline, up to the present time; to explain the nature of her peril. We have come across many things which are peculiarly German. All historical situations are, up to a certain point, unique. Hence their interest. Hence the importance of even the smallest detail. But there is another aspect as well. Germany in peril is also a European problem. It is not only Germany that needs restoration, Europe needs it too. A great number of people, however, consider restoration an odious term. It seems, therefore, quite probable that the general trend of affairs will be accepted as inevitable. This attitude would, as we have seen in previous chapters, not exclude reform; on the contrary, there are bound to be sweeping reforms and changes, such as Communism or the Totalitarian State endeavour to bring about. The new thing might bear a name which we do not yet know. Names matter little. What matters is that the kind of reform just referred to proceeds along the line of least resistance and does not restore. It supplants. The issue hangs in the balance. There is still hope that one day the fungus growth of suburbia will have been removed and the ancient nations of Christendom be restored to their old status—to the dignity and health of countries, united in the spirit of fellowship which befits their origin.

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